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THREE MINOR CANADIAN POETS: LOUIS ALEXANDER
MACKAY, LEO KENNEDY AND RAYMOND KNISTER

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Three Minor Canadian Poets: Louis Alexander MacKay, Leo Kennedy and Raymond Knister, submitted by G. Arthur Ross in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Poetry is directly relatable to the age in which it is written. It is either in accord with the mores of the age or it is a reaction against them. Louis Alexander MacKay wrote satire because he felt that much of his milieu was corrupt. He, as a sensitive man, felt responsible for that corruption and attempted to make the people of his generation recognize and destroy the origins of the delusion. MacKay was affected by his environment but he could transcend it through an intellectual skepticism. Finally though, MacKay withdrew from the literary scene of the 1930's.

Leo Kennedy did not show the same intellectual capacities as MacKay. His poetry reflected a rather romantic transcendence of his environment in its use of the life, death, resurrection myth based in the natural world. He had a vision of the wasteland but as in the work of T. S. Eliot, there was water promised. When the depression came in 1929 Kennedy found that there was a new reality. It was a reality that did not justify his romantic outlook. In the face of this new environment and its attitudes, Kennedy also left his promising position in Canadian letters.

Raymond Knister epitomizes the tragic struggle of the artist to come to terms with a shifting, threatening environment. Knister knew life and wanted to present it so

that his experience could be appreciated by many people. The excitement of the twenties did not censure his idea of sublime art and romantic vision of an artist's total dedication to art. Evidence describing Knister's life and experience after the depression indicates that he could not handle the many threats of his new environment. Knister died in 1932.

The forces affecting these men were in many ways common. Ultimately though, these three poets were moved to action by the impressions of their environment as they were filtered through the poets' individual sensibilities. Societal influence was great, but it cannot be considered the total force. Their reactions were a resultant of a variety of forces. In the long run neither of these three poets wanted or were able to fight for or against the new hope for society.

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INTRODUCTION

Because Canada does not have an extensive and recognizable literary tradition it is important that the literary critic find some other context in which he can assess the value of art. Art is a product of time and place. It is not created in a vacuum. In the corpus of Canadian literature, the sociological or genetic critical approach is a way to further aesthetic appreciation. Artists such as Raymond Knister, Leo Kennedy and L. A. MacKay were functions of their culture in that they were its articulate voice. In this sense, their art reflects and is the product of their milieu. It is valid, therefore, to examine their work in relation to their environment and to each other to locate a series of heterogeneous reactions in response to common stimuli. This thesis is concerned with the art, the age and the man. With such considerations operative in judgment, the genetic critic can establish the importance of a step in the development of Canadian literature. In addition, this approach provides an assessment of the forces influencing an artist in that the direct results of these forces are evident in the artist's work.

Canada in the 1920's presented a picture of a dynamic upsurge in literary activity. From the robust ballads of

Robert Service and Tom MacInnes that appeared in the early part of the century to the delicate imagistic verse of W. W. E. Ross and Raymond Knister in the second two decades of the twentieth century, poetry flourished. Generally, poetry before 1920 is characterized by the romantic tradition of flights of fancy and verbose, stilted diction. With the arrival of the twenties, however, this tradition began to be challenged. Wilson MacDonald produced The Miracle Songs of Jesus in 1921 and he continued writing romantic poetry. However, this volume is one of the last of its kind. The general popularity of the kind of verse MacDonald wrote is seen in John Garvin's anthology Canadian Poets and Poetry published in 1916.

One of the most significant changes in the nature of poetry came in 1925 and 1926 with E. J. Pratt's books The Witches' Brew and Titans. Pratt wrote poetry that was dynamic. It did not rely, as, for example, did the work of Lampman and Carman, on a calm landscape and a gentle, reflective tone. It was a powerful verse that dealt with whaling voyages and building of railroads. The language was fresh, even harsh, in contrast to the diction of Keats and Tennyson that the Confederation poets and Marjorie Pickthall so loved. The twenties were a period of change, a period when young poets such as F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith were flexing their poetic muscles and demanding an individuality. This was the scene that produced the poetry that made up New Provinces: poems of several authors in 1936. Even more, the twenties produced such progressive magazines as The McGilliad, The McGill Fortnightly Review and The Canadian Mercury. Mag-

azines of this type were necessary because such established periodicals as The Canadian Bookman, oracle of the Canadian Author's Association, Queen's Quarterly and The Canadian Forum were not giving credence to the emergence of a truly indigenous Canadian art. A comparison of the material published by these magazines and their general policies will demonstrate just what younger generation poets such as L. A. MacKay, Leo Kennedy and Raymond Knister were up against.

Such university sponsored magazines as The Dalhousie Review and Queen's Quarterly did not support the emergence of the new poetry. Instead they pursued their academic bent, focusing on more general and erudite subjects. Reviews in these magazines practically excluded any work native to Canada. It was a status quo arrangement as they invariably carried articles on past literary giants or learned discussions of books about such renowned figures as Byron, Plato or Pope. For example, in the August, 1924 issue of Queen's Quarterly the main article was "The Conflict of Idealism and Realism".¹ This was not a notation concerning the modern struggle with that problem, but a Socratic dialogue. It would be inaccurate to say that Queen's Quarterly was denying important matters. But it is deplorable that a magazine of such prestige and scope should ignore the potentialities of the Canadian scene. The extent of the Quarterly's ignorance is astoundingly evidenced by the fact that from August, 1924 to May, 1925 there was a very insignificant recognition of Canadian poetry; and that was not of the new school. When one considers that such Canadian writers as E. J. Pratt, Raymond Knister, A. J.

M. Smith, F. R. Scott and A. M. Klein were publishing more and more, the attitude of Queen's Quarterly and, in the same way, The Dalhousie Review was priggish in its blind groping for academic acclaim.

As much as the university magazines refused Canadian writers recognition, The Canadian Bookman and its founding fathers the Canadian Author's Association are only slightly less to be condoned for their insipid refusal to notice change. F. R. Scott's 1936 poem "The Canadian Author's Meet" is a well-worded condemnation of the archaic C. A. A.:

Expansive puppets percolate self-unction
Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales.
Miss Crochet's muse has somehow failed to function,
Yet she's a poetess

.....

O Canada, O Canada O can
A day go by without new author's springing
To paint the native maple, and to plan
More ways to set the selfsame welkin ringing?

Scott's satire is not unwarranted. Instead of promoting Canadian poetry as it purported to, The Canadian Bookman was a retarding factor. It did not recognize that the new poets "were anxious poets, in conscious reaction against the easy optimism of Carman and Roberts, Service and MacInnes, and they were determined to face their age rather than to retreat to nature, love, the open road or any of the other romantic refuges."² The Canadian Bookman insisted on supporting a tradition that had gone out of fashion fifteen years before. The 1928 poetry number is filled with pale

imitations of early and mid-nineteenth century poetry. The poet of the day was Christina Willey, who was completely out of tune with the progressive urges of the Montreal Group and other avant garde poets. Critically, The Canadian Bookman showed even less taste than did its selection of poetry. A 1930 review of Muriel Bruce's novel Mukara is a precious example. John Garvin, the reviewer says:

It is an amazing story admirably conceived and written. It is romantic and imaginative to an exceptional degree, but the incidents are so consecutive and vivid in detail as to appear real and believable Congratulations are due the author and her native city.³

These comments are idle and in no way germane to an accurate book review. Garvin is more impressed with the idea that he is in a position to hand out plaudits than he is in the reason for doing so. It is significant that these issues occurred so late in the decade. While The Canadian Bookman was praising its Christina Willeys and Muriel Bruces, the important poets such as F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, et al were attacking the cloistered ignorance of The Canadian Bookman on every side. As early as 1925, A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott had established The McGill Fortnightly Review because they could not find a magazine in Canada that would publish their work. Even when The Fortnightly Review ceased publication, A. J. M. Smith, his group and a newcomer, Leo Kennedy tried again with The Canadian Mercury in 1928.

The Canadian Mercury was not a success. Its first issue appeared in December, 1928 and its last in June, 1929. What The Canadian Mercury did do was provide a vehicle

through which the new group could fight. It was a revolutionary magazine in the sense that it did not show the proper veneration for the type of poetry and ideals of the powerful The Canadian Bookman and its supporters. Polemics were its credo.

In brief, it may be said that with exception of a spinster aunt in London and a wild uncle in America, neither of whom would claim relationship -- THE CANADIAN MERCURY is individual . . . and again we revert to our hobby. We have no preconceived idea of Canadian literature which we are endeavouring to propogate; our faith rests in the spirit which is at last beginning to brood upon our literary chaos. We believe that an order will come out of the void, an order of a distinct type, reflecting, as modern Canadian painting has begun to do, a unique experience of nature and life.

Above all, THE CANADIAN MERCURY is intended primarily for the younger writers in this country. The editors are all well under thirty and intend to remain so. We seek to ally with ourselves all those whose literary schooling has survived the Confederation, and whose thought and verse is not afraid of being called free.⁴

Obviously cut off from any financial aid, the editors of The Canadian Mercury went ahead with their plan. They included work of A. M. Klein, Dorothy Livesay, F. R. Scott, Jean Burton, A. J. M. Smith and such lesser known poets as N. W. Hainsworth and Constance Davies Woodrow. Their book reviews and articles tended to lose some validity as the authors' exhuberance sometimes shaded their critical judgment, but in all were more honest than those in The Canadian Bookman and more topical than the reviews in Queen's Quarterly. Never before in Canadian letters had anyone spoken out so strongly and pointedly as Leo Kennedy did in "The Future of Canadian Literature". He hurls charges at the universities for their failure to recognize the value of Canadian art

and he derides the Canadian Author's Association as "that pillar of flim-flam".⁵ Without financial aid, however, the fate of small magazines in Canada is usually quick and negative. So it was with The Canadian Mercury.

Fortunately there was a magazine that trod middle ground between Queen's Quarterly, The Canadian Bookman and The Canadian Mercury. The Canadian Forum did have an interest in Canadian art and found room to publish many articles, poems and short stories of younger new poets. But The Canadian Forum never adopted a clearly defined policy. At one moment a reviewer would talk about having a "tough enough" sensibility to survive the 'O Gods' and 'damns' of a book, while on the other, A. Y. Jackson would discourse on Canadian painting. The March 1921 edition contained quite a good article on "Canadian Poetry" in which the author, Huntly K. Gordon, makes some sharp observations.

Despite flattering reviews of "excellent and truly Canadian poetry", English Canada fails to produce a distinctive verse of literary value. New volumes appear continually and are, for the most part, as quickly relegated to their deserved limbo.⁶

Saving himself from being too critical, however, Gordon feels the need to add that he likes nature verse of the Carman type. As if to further vindicate himself for his rash comments, he proceeds to praise Mrs. Moodie and urge a distinctive native tradition. Gordon's article seems to exemplify the position of The Canadian Forum. It was a progressive magazine yet it could not entirely divorce itself from tradition. For the new poets wishing to publish, Canada had little to offer

before 1925 and only a slightly better situation occurred when the Montreal Group began its magazines. Established periodicals would not accept avant garde work. Parochial attitudes and commitment to tradition beset the young poets at every turn. It is little wonder that Raymond Knister and later, Leo Kennedy and L. A. MacKay, immigrated to the United States.

In quantity, the poetic output of the three poets studied in this thesis is slight. L. A. MacKay did not write prolifically and the sum of his work from the twenties and thirties is seen in Viper's Bugloss, a pamphlet published in 1938. Other than his play, The Freedom of Jean Guichet, 1927, various other poems that were published in The Canadian Forum, The Canadian Poetry Magazine, Canadian Verse, Saturday Night and Poetry (Chicago) are collected in The Ill-Tempered Lover which was published in 1948. Mainly he was a scholar, educated at the University of Toronto and later at Oxford where he was a Rhodes Scholar. He returned to Canada from Oxford about 1927 -- exact dates are not available -- and began teaching Classics at the University of Toronto. While there he wrote the majority of the poems appearing in Viper's Bugloss. He was not particularly associated with the Montreal Group, as was Leo Kennedy, but his poetry reflects many of their attitudes. The long poem "And Spoil the Child", for example, shows his distaste for the state of Canadian letters perpetrated by the Canadian Author's Association. The series of critical articles that he wrote for The Canadian Forum in 1932 and 1933 gives evidence that MacKay was con-

cerned about the apparent lack of critical standards that made mock of intelligent criticism. He was concerned, as he explains in an article, "On Not Understanding the Poets"⁷ about the role of the poet and how, if he could, the poet might be honest to his subject without losing communication with the readers. Finally MacKay left Ontario and accepted a teaching position at the University of British Columbia in the early 1940's. From there he moved to California and little more biographical data is available. In all he was a sensitive man who fought through satire to correct the evils of his age. It is unfortunate that more of his work has not been collected.

Leo Kennedy was born six years later than L. A. MacKay in 1907 in Liverpool, England. As a child he moved to Montreal where he later studied at McGill University. While at McGill in 1925, Kennedy became associated with A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott who were then busily establishing The McGill Fortnightly Review. Kennedy, with Smith and Scott, formed the nucleus of the Montreal Group which was responsible for much of the literary activity of the 1920's and 1930's. It is obvious that there was a mutual stimulation between these poets who carried on with The Canadian Mercury in 1928 after The McGill Fortnightly Review ceased publication. There was an excitement in poetry when these men rebelled against the status quo of literature. With Scott writing barbed satires and Smith and Kennedy searching for new talent, this group spearheaded the movement toward an indigenous Canadian art. Kennedy showed great potential as poet and

critic but his only poetic work is found in a short volume titled The Shrouding. The poems in this book reflect the romance of the twenties as they offer an alternative to the Catholicism that Kennedy found inadequate. Rebellion was the spirit, a spirit that is strongly presented in his most influential article "The Future of Canadian Literature".³ Kennedy exhalted in the idea of rebellion, but after The Shrouding was published in 1933 he wrote very little. He left Montreal in the mid-thirties and was, during the war, working as a journalist and writing reviews for the Chicago Sun. He then became an advertising executive in Connecticut.

Raymond Knister was two years older than L. A. MacKay and eight years Leo Kennedy's senior.⁹ He was born on May 27, 1899 near Camber in Essex County, Ontario. It was in this area that he lived and worked on his father's farm, tending pedigreed Clydesdales and generally aiding in farm labor. A glimpse of what young Raymond Knister may have felt about farm life is seen in the short story "Mist-Green Oats" (1922) and in the poem "Stable-Talk". "Mist-Green Oats" is the story of a lonely boy wishing to escape the rigors of farm life. Much the same view is presented in the play Youth Goes West (1928) where a young man feels the urge to travel and is given an opportunity to leave the farm. It is significant that in the later work the youth is killed before he can escape; Knister's attitude toward escape changed markedly from 1922 to 1928 and the change demonstrated by these works shows the development of a tragic sensibility. The origins of Knister's malleable sensibility occurred in early child-

hood. His parents, governed by ideals of hard work and perfection -- raising of pedigreed horses -- demanded a great deal from the young boy. It is a generally accepted psychological tenet that an overbearing adult standard imposed on children creates in the child a susceptibility to mental aberrations such as pain, anguish and introspection. The fact that seven year old Knister began to stammer suddenly one day would indicate that he had had an experience that his highly sensitive mind could not accept and the result of that rejection was physiologically manifested. Because of his speech defect and his parents' interest in education, Raymond Knister was sent to the University of Toronto in 1919. That same year however, he became ill from an influenza epidemic and returned to Cedar Springs in Kent County where his father was then fruit farming.

When he recovered his health through strenuous farm labor, Knister's growing interest in writing and the negative response from Canadian magazines led him to Iowa City, Iowa. He became associated with Harriet Munroe's magazine Poetry and with The Midland under the editorship of John T. Frederick. It was with The Midland that Knister won recognition. Frederick liked Knister's imagist verse and stories of Ontario farm life and in the December 1922 edition of The Midland, several of his poems were published. As Knister's experience grew, he won a place on the editorial board of The Midland. All of Knister's letters from this period of his life express his joy and freedom.

But Knister felt the urge to return to Canada -- the

poem "After Exile" tells of this need. He returned in 1926 to Canada where he began to publish in The Canadian Forum, Toronto Star Weekly and This Quarter (Paris). Most of his work was now prose. After his 1927 marriage to Myrtle Gamble, Knister continued to write White Narcissus a novel of much the same theme as the poem "After Exile". In the novel Richard Milne, a writer, returns to the farm in search of his love and the old simple life. But he again finds complexities in his love's parental ties and in his ambivalent attitude to the farm. Finally all ends well. After the 1927 publication of White Narcissus Knister began to compile an anthology of short stories which was completed and published in 1928.

It was at this time that Knister became interested in the life of Keats. The tragedy of Keats's genius meeting an early death became a fascination to Knister. In My Star Predominant, published in 1934, Knister traces the last four years of Keats's life. In the first half of the book the story revolves around the slow death of Tom Keats, John's brother. In the second part, Keats's own death is the center. Throughout, though, death and the creative process are linked in a strange way. Keats, like Knister, was always financially unstable. Money was not central but a nagging necessity. I feel that I am not reading of John Keats, but of Raymond Knister. The novel, submitted to a Graphic Press contest, with which Frederick Phillip Grove was associated, won the one thousand dollar prize for the best novel written in 1931. However, Graphic Press went bankrupt and Knister did not re-

ceive much of his prize.

Knister's problems began to increase in 1931. His daughter now one year old was an increasing expenditure while the depression had stifled a writer's market. There were marital problems as Knister's highly idealistic attitudes toward art did not find favorable reception with his deaf, reticent wife. Throughout the winter, Leo Kennedy tried to help Knister over his stutter by having him read Shakespeare aloud. Nothing seemed to matter to Knister except art. He became a sacrificial figure, as was Keats. The artist, he says, in My Star Predominant, is nobody:

"A poet, my dear young lady is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity -- he is continually in, for, and filling some other body --"10

Knister was totally capable of believing himself a sacrificial figure. His creative powers were failing, or so he believed -- anything good would have been perfect: "I hope to write something good here; though I have written a good many things in the last two months from pillar to post I do not find them good." Suddenly he was dead, drowned in Lake St. Clair in August 1932. Much controversy has arisen over whether or not his death was accidental or suicidal. I believe from the evidence found in many unpublished letters and the corpus of his work that Knister took his own life.

The age of the nineteen twenties and early thirties was a varied one. The twenties were rich enough to support nearly any raison d'être. The thirties were chaotic. The three poets to be considered in this thesis were to a large

extent products of their age and their age in turn was influenced by them. Poetry survived by change. Survival for the poets was an individual concern.

CHAPTER I

L. A. MACKAY

The origins of satiric poetry in Canada were concomittant with the years 1920-1935 which saw the 1929 depression bring to an end the period of great activity and optimism following the first World War. It was an age well suited to satirists as they watched the tremendous advancement of the 1920's, not tempered by any protective foresight, crumble under the onslaught of economic paralysis. People conditioned by the pre-depression optimism were little prepared for conditions that left men destitute of both moral and material solace. They had easily forgotten the horror of World War I. After that holocaust, no nation would dare start a war. People were easily seduced by the wonders of national development, and they were very vulnerable. Young poets such as A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott and L. A. MacKay criticized the nation's romantic concern with its immediate development. In "Rend Your Heart and Not Your Garments,"¹ a 1936 poem, MacKay says "We were weak . . . we were disunited . . . Hellgates are open; we could have kept them locked." This is a retrospective poem that characterizes the despair of poets who felt responsible for the stupidity of their age. Poets were

socially aware and strongly affected by their environment so they turned to satire to attack the blindness and stupidity that left a whole nation defenseless, at the mercy of economic vagaries. F. R. Scott's attitude is strongly reflected in such poems as "Natural Resources" (1932) and "Epitaph for a Financier" (1930) which satirize a capitalism that allows few to be wealthy and many to be poor (see Appendix A). While his attack is vehement and well directed, it is the work of a lesser-known poet, L. A. MacKay, that stands out as the most accurate and biting chronicle of the age.

MacKay was born in 1901 in Hensall, Ontario where he lived until he moved to Toronto and took a degree in Classics at the University of Toronto. Following post-graduate work at Oxford as a Rhodes scholar, MacKay returned to Toronto where he lectured in Classics at the university. He became involved in the literary fervor of the late 1920's. Here young writers such as Dorothy Livesay, Leo Kennedy and Raymond Knister were gaining recognition as poets eschewing past traditions while writing verse that was topical, concerned with immediate problems. They, along with F. R. Scott, A. M. Klein and A. J. M. Smith, established such magazines as The McGill Fortnightly Review, The McGilliad and Canadian Mercury. It was a dynamic group that began to give Canadian literature its own distinctive flavor. Under this influence, MacKay also began to feel the need for a poetry that dealt with real situations and

attitudes. This was a break from the "age of brass"² writers such as Robert Service and Ralph Connor who, much like Roberts and Carman, styled themselves on the traditions of the English Romantic and Victorian poets. It was a passé tradition because within its terms of removal from actuality, it failed to be immediate and applicable. In an article on "Audrey Alexandra Brown" published in 1932, MacKay presents his view of what poets should be doing:

Up to about ten years ago our better poets were in the general paddling along placidly in the wake of the Lake poets, with a few daring touches of Swinburne, and a good bit of Mrs. Felicia Hiemans, though one or two hardy souls had struck off into the wilderness after Kipling or Masfield. At present the most promising younger poets, particularly those around twenty-five are being irrigated with very invigorating results by the more extreme and emphatic revolutionaries among contemporary English and American poets.³

MacKay, being one of those poets "around twenty-five", began to write poetry that satirized the conditions that perpetuated Canada's depressed condition. He could not accept the bombast of the 1920's so he reacted negatively. In Viper's Bugloss, the 1938 publication of a pamphlet of poems collected from late 1920 and early 1930 editions of The Canadian Forum and other small magazines, MacKay attempted to arouse his readers, to influence his environment so that conditions that sponsored the depression would not be repeated. Essentially, the poems from Viper's Bugloss will comprise the main source of material for this study, but reference will also be made to poems appearing in The Ill-

Tempered Lover which was published in 1948.⁴

Although the majority of MacKay's poems are satirical, it would not be accurate to classify all of his work in this way. Several poems exhibit MacKay's consciousness of social problems but do not, as most satire does, ridicule or hurl invective at the subject. They are poems of social comment in which the tragedy of situations most suited to satire adds a great deal of force to the poet's observations. The satirist's attack is generally directed at folly or stupidity that endangers freedom or well-being. Often there are disastrous consequences stemming from folly. MacKay lampoons the conditions leading to the disaster but, by recognizing the tragedy inherent in the folly, transcends invective and establishes his message as a thing not bound by time. MacKay was brilliant at recognizing the dual nature of a situation deserving satirical treatment. Further, he could effectively combine the humor and tragedy within a poem. The tension in this combination controls the poem as it is written on the page. But once that tension is transferred to the more expansive area of the reader's mind, the components of the tension take on a significance that may only be obliquely suggested in the words themselves. In such poems as F. R. Scott's "March Field" or A. J. M. Smith's "In the Wilderness" (see Appendix A), there is a basic recognition of the dual nature of the subject, but it is not nearly so well developed as in MacKay's poem "Admonition for Spring". Here MacKay focuses a plaintive social comment in a lyrical form so that each

factor in the poem's development supports the other.

Look away now from the high lonesome hills
 So hard on the hard sky since the swift shower;
 See where among the restless daffodils
 The hyacinth sets his melancholy tower.

Draw in your heart from vain adventurings;
 Float slowly, swimmer, slowly drawing breath.
 See in this wild green foam of growing things
 The heavy hyacinth remembering death.

This is not a poem of direct statement but one that relies upon the subt^elties of contrast and allusion for its effect. The allusion here is to the myth of Hyacinthus who was beloved by both Apollo and Zephyrus. When Zephyrus became jealous of Hyacinthus' attachment to Apollo, he caused Apollo inadvertantly to kill Hyacinthus. Where the blood of Hyacinthus fell on the ground, the Hyacinth flower grew. Thus the flower becomes an eternal symbol of the result of the struggle between two opposed deities. In context of this myth, "Admonition for Spring" becomes an admonition to be aware not only of Apollo, the god of culture and goodness, but also of Zephyrus, the west wind god who can be destructive. More directly, the poet cautions against too much involvement "in this wild green foam of growing things" to the exclusion of "The heavy hyacinth remembering death". When the poem is equated to the poet's environment, it is not too difficult to draw the parallels that make the poem a direct comment on the Canadian condition in the late 1920's. The "vain adventurings" of stanza two and the "restless daffodils" of the first stanza suggest the excitement and activity before the depression. The "heavy

hyacinth" symbolizes the result of sudden disaster. The tragedy of Hyacinthus' death gains more force from its association to the 'death' of a society. It is the tragedy implicit in the poet's admonition that provides the poem's poignant force and moves its subject from a microcosmic landscape treatment of myth to the macrocosm of social disaster.

A direct comparison of "Admonition for Spring" to Scott's "March Field" and Smith's "In the Wilderness" will demonstrate more fully the primacy of MacKay's sensibility. Scott's poem is very much like "Admonition for Spring". Scott is concerned with a "bare prison" under "a hollow sky" where the hiatus of winter is not replaced by spring. It is a dead land both spiritually and physically. The final lines of the poem

But no seed stirs
In this bare prison
Under the hollow sky.
The stone is not yet rolled away
Nor the body risen[.]

correspond to these concluding lines of Smith's "In the Wilderness":

His gaze is stopped in the hard earth
And cannot penetrate to heaven's mirth.

Scott, like Smith who focuses on the "pedantic eye", satirizes those people who expect the physical discomforts of the real world to be obliterated by divine intervention. To these young realists such attitudes are foolish. But

neither poet attempts to make his message like a clarion. Instead, they have made an attempt to capture both pathos and cryptic comment. However they do not wholly succeed. Scott's comment loses creditibility because it is almost a verbatim echo of T. S. Eliot. There is little to spur the reader's imagination or to hold his intellect to the point of the satire. Smith's poem is much more satisfying but fails through its verboseness -- the fifth couplet, for example, is superfluous -- and its too precious ending. Smith states directly what Scott implies ironically. Neither is successful because the emphasis of their poems is at odds with the general tenor of the observation. They have failed to take into consideration the element of the reader's intelligence. MacKay, however, in "Admonition for Spring" attains perfect balance between the point of comment, the poetics and the end result that titillates the reader but does not make the point painfully obvious. MacKay's poem is rich and full. It has extension, it is able to break the bond of syntax whereas Scott and Smith spike their poems with inadequate sensibilities.

An examination of the imagery and technique of "Admonition for Spring" reveals MacKay's technical virtuosity and his awareness of T. S. Eliot. The first image of the poem seems paradoxical. It is spring with "swift showers" rejuvenating the dormant buds so that the "hills" are covered with "restless daffodils". Yet the "hills" are "lonesome". The hyacinth is melancholy and

the "swimmer" is cautioned to "Float slowly . . . slowly drawing breath". It would be an idle task to find similar images in Eliot's poetry but it is interesting to note how the tone of the poem carries the slowness and despair as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "The Wasteland". The poet is no longer interested, as Wordsworth would have been, in the "restless daffodils". Instead there is a concern with death and melancholy where the showers and the sky are "hard". The opening lines of "The Wasteland" have the same tone:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.⁶

Again it is spring but it is a cruel time where rain stirs "Dull roots". As in MacKay's poem there is a firm classical control slowing down the rhythm, creating a deadening effect that enforces the dispassionate response to the subject. Perhaps in this 1930 poem by MacKay the equation is more obvious:

Now o'er the one-half world the frosty rime
Sits like Eternity on the lids of time.
Slowly the earth breathes in troubled sleep.
On the woods and fields the unchanging snow lies deep.
Deep on the fields the kindly snow-drifts lie.
And only men and beasts are born to die.

Yet higher prowls the stealthy sun,
Quick to revenge the ruthless seasons run;
The quiet pine raises her patient head,
The rivers, groaning, toss their tumbled bed,
Crocus and hyacinth consort with men,
And the whole world wakes to death again.⁷

The emphasis in stanza one is on the earth covered in "frosty rime" while the "stealthy sun" begins to thaw the earth making "rivers" groan and "toss their tumbled bed". MacKay is aware of the paradox that the seasons, especially spring, are "ruthless". Spring is a time of growth and energy, yet a necessary corollary to spring is autumn which brings temporary death to "Crocus and hyacinth". "Men and beasts are born to die" but the vegetable world lives on. To MacKay and Eliot, the "Crocus and hyacinth" are the unlucky ones as they cannot escape the world even through death. It is a particularly dark vision yet one that has been forced upon the poet's sensibility by his environment.

After the somewhat lengthy discussion to establish the importance and validity of MacKay's art, it is necessary to examine his technique and show that it is adequate to express the poet's insight. In contrast to the enjambment of "The Wasteland", the lines of "Admonition for Spring" are end-stopped. There is a strict rhyme scheme abab cded which, when coupled with the pentameter lines, gives one the sense that the poet is firmly directing the form of the poem to correspond with its content. There are no superfluous words to hinder the free lyrical movement of the lines although there is an abundance of adjectives. The adjectives, such as in the line "See in this wild green foam of growing things", slow down the

rhythm so the spondaic effect of "wild green" is even more accentuated. Although the line reads slowly because of an abundance of single syllable words, there is a particularly graceful cadence that unifies the poem. This produces a tone that emphasizes the poem's solemn mood. The cadence is established in the first line: "Look away now from the high lonesome hills". The caesura on either side of "now" lets the reader's voice catch up with the inflection of "Look away". Soft "o" and "a" sounds provide assonance that is subtly shifted to the harder alliterative "s" sounds of line two: "So hard on the hard sky since the swift shower". The pivot word is "So" as its unaccented syllable combines the assonance of line one with the sibilant "s" sounds of appropriately onomatopoetic words "sky since the swift shower" of the second line. MacKay handles this tone leading very well as further demonstrated by the final couplet of the previously quoted untitled poem:

Crocus and hyacinth consort with men,
And the whole earth awakes to death again.

The alliterative hard "c" and "s" sounds of the first line fade into the softer "i" and "e" sound of "with men". Assonance characterizes the second line until "awakes" combines both sounds. This is an important point in the poem and MacKay is a good enough technician to make it all the more emphatic by focusing the contrasting tones in one important word.

It would be unfair to expect MacKay's more harsh satire to be composed with the same finesse shown in the above-quoted poems. Satire, by its very nature, relies upon force for its effect. If the reader is to be occupied with subtle allusions, the immediate force of the poet's expression will be decreased. MacKay makes this point in an essay "On Not Understanding the Poets":

Poetry has two aims that do not always coincide: expression and communication. These can only coincide⁸ when the poet feels at one with the prevailing culture.

He goes on to say:

It is obvious that modern poetry, at least in the Western world, does not feel itself at one with the prevailing culture. Consequently the modern poet is compelled to make some sacrifice either of expression or of communication. If he expresses what he wants to say, in the way that brings out all the meaning to himself, then unless his mind is completely commonplace, he will not be readily understood by large numbers of his readers. Or the other hand, if he confines himself to what will be readily understood, he cannot help feeling that he is being inadequate and inaccurate.⁹

MacKay follows this manifesto in his own work. Since MacKay does not "feel at one with the prevailing culture", it seems that he must sacrifice "expression" to make his satire effective. The object of satire is to "communicate" a point rather than mask it with the subtleties of "expression". In the following poem, MacKay indulges in real invective; but it is invective with direction, that does not miss the point.

I wish my tongue were a quiver the size of a huge
cask

Packed and crammed with long black venomous
rankling darts.

I'd fling you more full of them and joy in the task
Than ever Sebastian was, or Caesar, with thirty-
three swords in his heart.

And I would stand by and watch you wriggle and
writhe, gurgling through the barbs in your throttle
Like a woolly caterpillar pinned on its back -- man,
that would be sweet!¹⁰

The invective is directed at all people in an attempt to make them realize that they need to be criticized. The satirist delights in his role -- "man, that would be sweet!"-- because he sees himself as superior and able to fling his "darts" much like a Christ-figure who wants to correct what he thinks wrong. The satirist must demonstrate the superiority of his position over the one attacked and in this poem, MacKay strongly expresses his militant conviction of the validity of his position.¹¹

In the above poem, one can see how MacKay has left the subtle technique of "Admonition for Spring" and turned to the serious business of satire. His ability to handle various types of verse from varying points of view attests the prowess and diversity of a good poet. In the following poem, MacKay shows the form that moved E. K. Brown to call him "our most angry and clever satirist".¹²

Ask not me how much is true
In all this -- as if I knew!
Other men before my time
Have wonderfully lied in rhyme,
Nor likely knew, no more than I,
Which was true and which was lie.
Take the words, nor seek to find
What if anything lies behind.
Damn the meaning! Take the sound!
It's words that make the world go round.¹³

By disclaiming his importance, "as if I knew", MacKay sets up an inversion technique. The reader questions the assertion that the poet has lied in rhyme because he sees that the poet's awareness that prompted him to write the poem in the first place is contradictory to the professed ignorance -- "Nor likely knew no more than I". It is necessary that the reader recognize this inversion or the satire of the last two lines is lost. MacKay's implied position is that too many people "Damn the meaning!" and believe it is true that "words . . . make the world go round." In terms of social comment, this poem is seen as a criticism of the people who willingly believed what their leaders tell them. They accept the words that should be true without examining the basis -- "what if anything lies behind". MacKay has attempted to shock people out of their complacency into a realization that words without facts to give them meaning are the worst kind of lie.

Thus far it appears that MacKay has a scrambled, unpredictable view of his environment. He is politically a conservative, artistically a liberal with a great deal of enthusiasm for modern art, yet his poetic form and basic organizing principle of his thought are classical. The greatest expression of his conservative point of view is in "Fidelia Vulnera Amici" where he satirizes the blind razing of Canada's resources:

But we, most infinitely wiser grown,
Adore him most who most despoils our own.

And lest too slow ourselves our wealth should waste,
 Still bawl and bray, in desparate haggard haste,
 Calling the carrion crows of all the earth
 To glut the unhappy land that gave us birth.
 (Appendix A)

This poem was first published in 1931, a time when Canadians were beginning to realize fully what had given rise to the depression. In MacKay's view this was Canada's economic prostitution to Britain and the United States. In attacking such short sightedness, he is a reactionary conservative. In the same way, MacKay finds that the only way to impose an order on a chaotic world is to return to a point of reference that exists as a stasis. MacKay's classical training naturally led him to the Golden Age of Greece. There is little direct reference to this period but the poems "Pagan Death" and "Outmoded Wisdom" (1936) seem to define his philosophy (see Appendix A). It is not an optimistic outlook but rather one that has been formulated in response to the forces influencing his life. An enumeration of world situations that affected MacKay up to 1935 is explanation enough for his somber attitude. Whatever good happened, it seems, was overdone and resulted in disaster. MacKay was sensitive to the kind of life that the new mechanization instituted. His reactions are those of a man unable to reconcile his personal morality with the "mire" of twentieth century living. To find an order that was not based on such highly mutable principles as those of the "roaring" 1920's, MacKay found himself in a negative, polemic stance. From this point of view

his order became a reactionary thing in the real world. That is, MacKay's order sprang from his reaction against the existing order. This was stabilized by his belief in Greek culture.

Like A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy and A. M. Klein, L. A. MacKay urged a new liberalism in art. Young poets no longer wanted to follow the tradition in poetry. They wished to write as they saw, whether it be imagistic or of a more expansive reaction. In "And Spoil the Child" (1931) MacKay effectively lampoons those poets who write niceties over which the Canadian Authors' Association¹⁴ can murmur faint damning praise. For the new generation of poets, born with the emergence of Raymond Knister in the early 1920's, there was no life in Canadian poetry.¹⁵ A new form and a new subject was needed. Most important, a freedom of view was needed. Smith and Scott practised their poetical theory by writing verse that did not rely on meter and rhyme for its effect. Smith's "Sea Cliff" and Scott's "Sunday" are good examples of how the "new poetry" eliminated such conventionalities as regular rhythm, strictly controlled line beat and end rhymes (see Appendix A). MacKay, however, never uses this new verse form. Predominantly, he uses a pentameter line with end rhymes ab ab, aa bb, abc abc or abba. He does this to arrive at a correspondence between form and his approach to the subject. Most of his poetry is satire. As satire, poetry must deal with subtleties as well as invective. In

such a poem as "And Spoil the Child" (1931), the regular iambic pentameter lines and aa rhyme scheme are ironic. It is intentionally ironic as MacKay satirizes these authors in their own style (some equations might be: Gallus as Robert Service, Robustus as D. C. Scott, Bufo as Bliss Carman). In addition, the simple structure provides a convenient satirical frame. By using the first line of a couplet as a "straight" line and then undercutting it with the second line, MacKay focuses the satire. Perhaps MacKay could have been more innovative in some of his verse structure. Scott, Smith and Klein managed the new forms well and through experimentation gave poetry a new life. In spite of all, however, MacKay did not use the new verse forms. Perhaps he did not feel at ease with them. If such were so, it is better that MacKay should have written good 'traditional' verse than bad new verse.

One of MacKay's principal targets in his satiric poems is love. Especially, he refers to a romantic love where the lover is so blinded by the ideal of love that he forgets that, in truth, love is a human emotion existing in a world that is far from ideal. By becoming too enraptured with their ideal, the objects of MacKay's attack, pervert their feeling and, like courtly lovers, turn the beautiful into the grotesque. MacKay makes this point in "Love that is Glorious".

Love that is glorious in the birth
 Of a new heaven and a new earth
 Never expects to find as well
 A new and very perfect hell.¹⁶

MacKay is conservative in this poem, cautioning against love that creates "a new heaven and a new earth". It is a contrast to the point of view expressed in "On Audrey Alexandra Brown" where he is the liberal, advocating break with tradition. His point of view is governed by the environment that draws his attention. He is conservative about politics because he has seen what liberalism has led to. In this poem, MacKay recognizes the attitude of young people who fall in love for the first time to believe that they are the first lovers, that they have discovered a fantastic new experience. But if the "new heaven" and "new earth" are not solidly based, they may easily slip into "a very perfect hell". On a broader plane, "heaven" and "earth" invite the reader to take them literally which then indicates that MacKay's subject has superceded merely individual concern and approached a general human condition. After World War I, Canada expanded rapidly, creating, as it were, "a new heaven and a new earth". In MacKay's vision this "love" is a narcissistic involvement that limits the scope of vision until the nation could not see how it was really moving toward self-destruction. It is a "very perfect hell" because it is self-made.

Love can be beautiful as in "Stand, Swaying Slightly",¹⁷ but more often it is an egocentric fascination whose "hand is black basalt, and his veins / Are rocky veins, ablaze with gold and fire."¹⁸

So then your heart's a rough old ragged box,
Warped, weather-beaten, gaping at the joints,

Tossed in the rubbish, among broken locks,
And rusty hoops and cracked old harrow points.

I thought it was a polished casket, fit
To shrine my jewelled love! Instead of these
A small torn dingy thing, his love fills it
Like a handful of dried peas.¹⁹

In this poem there is a satiric twist to the lover's complaint. He has seen his lover's heart as a "polished casket, fit / To shrine my jewelled love". Instead of the goddess he expected, he finds that "her heart's a rough old ragged box" that did not want his grandiose affection. The imagery describing her, though "rusty" and "broken", is concrete. She has the capacity to love in a practical, meaningful way whereas his "jewelled love" is the kind that builds a "new and very perfect hell". It is ironic that the jilted lover should blame his partner for his own lacking. But it is MacKay's technique to have the lover inveigh against his ex-love while, because of the ironic twist, he is criticizing himself. Thus the appearance of the poem is reversed and the implied position of the satirist -- that love is "Yon dowdy dull domestic thing" but infinitely better than "jewelled" love -- adds additional force to the attack.²⁰

This technique of ironic reversal is more clearly seen in other poems dealing with social satire. In "Sour Sonnet For Simpletons", there is a direct statement of how illusion and reality provide the necessary satirical contrasts.

If England were what England seems,

A toothless tiger, trapped and tame,
 Too dazed for fear, too dulled for shame,
 A drooling dotard mumbling dreams,
 If England were what Hitler deems,
 A pawn in every tyrant's game,
 A squirt to smother freedom's flame
 In a soft froth of secret schemes,
 If England were what England shows,
 Traitor to friends, lackey to foes,
 And we were what we pretend,
 A free proud people clear of taint,
 Sweet liberty's undaunted friend,
 -- How quick we'd chuck her! But we aint.²¹

The poem is constructed of three principal "If" clauses that speculate on what may be. In each clause, the verb "were" stresses the hypothetical situation. The reader is prone to believe that what MacKay says of England is true until he reads the lines "And we were what we pretend, / A free proud people clear of taint". At this point the reader begins to realize that he -- "we"-- is placed in the same context as "England". The final line seems to support the poet's comments on England and to reassert the feeling that poet and reader are joined in attacking "England". The final "But we aint" undercuts this feeling of common cause and leaves the reader trapped. It is a complicated manoeuver but, when adroitly done as it is in this poem, the reader is forced to admit his fault of chastising on the basis of what seems. MacKay is angry at the hypocritical condemnation of England practised by people who are little qualified to comment; we are not "a free proud people clear of taint". By demanding the reader's awareness, MacKay teaches him to be discreet. It is a success of MacKay's art that he can effect a harsh judgment in a

seemingly innocent way. In The Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye says:

Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a context which the reader recognizes as grotesque, and at least an implicit moral standard, the latter²² being essential in a militant attitude to experience.

Alexander Pope managed to keep his satire from becoming "oppressively real" by using heroic couplets that retained a light lyrical tone that, by contrast, accentuated the poet's criticism. These lines from Pope's "Epistle II: On the Characters of Women"

Still round and round the ghosts of beauty glide,
And haunt the places where their honor died.
(ll. 241-242)

compared to this couplet from MacKay's "Fidelia Vulnera Amici"

Nor ask what did the Dinosaur gain
Whose body grew so far beyond his brain.²³

illustrate how both poets establish a mood of fantasy and then undercut it with the point of their attack. In Pope's lines, the satire is directed against women who have grown old and find their only solace in remembering the excitement of their youth. The past, "where honor died", seems a ludicrous point of reference for the aging "ghosts of beauty", yet there is a sense of tragedy in the transience of temporal beauty. The same idea, although on a lower level, is found in MacKay's couplet. The image of the Dinosaur "whose body grew so far beyond his brain" is

an accurate lampooning of Canada's growth in the 1920's when its brain -- government -- could not provide for the "body". This parallelism is indicative of MacKay's diversity as a poet and a critic. He manages to deal with a wide variety of subjects and retain the best qualities of them. Like Pope, MacKay conducts his satiric attack with finesse. He does not attack gross misconduct in a bombastic way, for that would overwhelm the more subtle aspects of the situation. He recognizes the tragedy that millions of people must suffer because of incompetent leadership; it is tragic, for the suffering hardly justifies the lesson.

MacKay's satire covers a broad spectrum of topics from lampooning Canada's political -- economical position between United States and Britain in "Fidelia Vulnera Amici", to "Frankie Went Down To The Corner" which directs attack at Ontario's liquor laws, and "Battle Hymn of the Spanish Rebellion", a pastiche, satirizing the church's role in the rebellion.²⁴ Nor is the state of Canadian culture ignored. In three poems, "And Spoil the Child", "The Raven Himself is Hoarse" and "He Gets It Off His Chest",²⁵ MacKay attacks "breathy bards on every hand" and parochial criticism whose criteria are hopelessly chauvinistic:

Here lies Canadian Poetry:
Died in a Hospital for Paralytics,
Smother'd in kindness by complacent critics.²⁶

Here, as in other poems and criticisms, MacKay's attack is against poets who have modelled themselves after the English Romantic and Victorian poets rather than being

aware of their immediate environment. The new poetry, influenced by Jung, Freud, Eliot and Pound, was concerned with social problems in a verse that carried reality in its tone and its very sparse form. Such Canadian poets as Wilson MacDonald and Wilfred Campbell who continued to accept the style and thought of an age fifty years past, were sharply criticised for their refusal to be contemporary:

See first where gentle Gallus gushes forth
Hymning the happy springtime of the North,
The sparkling drifts, or else the flaming trees,
In twenty thousand lines as like as peas.
How languidly the liquid lyrics droll
And dangle off into a dying fall,
. . . While Swinburne, tumbling with unquiet breast,
Mutters, "I'm dead; for God's sake let me rest!"²⁷

This attitude is again seen in "Bliss Carman: A Dialogue" where MacKay's talent with wit and humour make criticism more vital. MacKay refers to Carman as "a sort of hair-trigger versifer, and so always going off at half-cock."²⁸ MacKay and his contemporaries were liberal in their attitude to art. Throw out "The limp expression of a flabby thought . . . Write half as much, and write it twice as well." Forget the "Infinite Ecstasy" of "each twig's end," he tells the poets:

Listen to the pigs.
Four feet on earth, they stalk their sober way,²⁹
And speak, when they have found a thing to say.

In relation to his environment, "'Tis difficult", MacKay says, "to be no satirist."³⁰ As MacKay saw the decadence of Canadian culture, it is not surprising that

his "poetry [assumed] a special function of analysis, that is, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes . . . and all other things that impede the free movement of society."³¹ The whole structure of society in the 1920's was directed toward the establishment of a quasi-Utopia; that is, a direction in which optimism about the future in material terms ignored the problems of an industrially oriented society. To MacKay, the lack of foresight and high-pressure advancement could only end in disaster. He could only react negatively to such stimuli and finally he left Canada for a teaching position in the United States.

It is not as though MacKay did not try to change his environment. Through his art, he attempted to arouse interest, to make Canadians aware of their lot and how it came about. He, like Swift, Pope and the early Romans, Horace and Juvenal, expressed his feelings in a way designed to anger people and move them into action. There is almost a sense of desperation in the satirist's need to alter his environment. Socially conscious men are strongly affected by their milieu and if reality is shrouded in illusion or ignorance, it is the satirist's business to demonstrate error and offer at least an implied alternative. MacKay reacted against a lack of order that formed its codes according to immediate demand. His satire did assert "the validity and necessity of norms, systematic values, and meanings that are contained by recognizable codes."³² Perhaps MacKay's work does not attain the universality of Pope's but it is successful in cautioning

men of all time to be aware that:

Men mock the foolish wisdom of the wise.
Moles think men over-rate the worth of eyes.³³

CHAPTER II

LEO KENNEDY

Leo Kennedy was very much a part of the literary fervor of the 1920's and 1930's. He, with F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith and A. M. Klein, comprised the nucleus of the "Montreal Group" that opposed the too parochial attitudes towards Canadian literature held by such magazines as The Canadian Bookman and The Canadian Forum. Reaction to these magazines led Kennedy and his colleagues to form first The McGill Fortnightly Review and second The Canadian Mercury. Both of these magazines were successful only in part. The McGill Fortnightly Review was begun in 1925 but was forced to cease publication in 1927. In spite of this failure, the Montreal Group fought on. They began another magazine in 1928, The Canadian Mercury. A paragraph from the editorial of the first issue amply demonstrates the editors' polemic point of view:

The Canadian Mercury, then, with nothing between it and the eyes of the judiciary but an ingenious and rather ribald colophon, appears determined to preserve its policies in spite of all reactionary opposition; intent on offering the more thoughtful Canadian public the best available matter on subjects immediately concerning that public; demanding as we have said, a higher and more adequate standard of literary criticism in Canada, and striving to contribute in so far as it is possible to the consummation of that graceful ideal, the emancipation of Canadian literature from the state of amiable mediocrity and insipidity in which it now languishes.¹

Unfortunately The Canadian Mercury also met the same fate as its predecessor The McGill Fortnightly Review. The last issue of The Canadian Mercury appeared in June of 1929, just a few months before the death throes of the stock market paralysed North America.

As may be expected, there was little publishing activity after 1929. The Canadian Forum managed to survive the depression period but nearly all other magazines and books were left unpublished. Leo Kennedy's book of poems, The Shrouding, was an exception. It appeared in 1933 when such established poets as E. J. Pratt could not find a publisher. Kennedy's book, compiled from poems appearing in various issues of The Canadian Forum, The McGill Fortnightly Review, The McGilliad and The Canadian Mercury, was well received. One of the most influential plaudits came from E. J. Pratt: "It is not often that a first presentation displays such finished craftsmanship and a technical manner which forces interlinear meanings of a deep emotional cast upon condensed expression".² Kennedy had done something different in Canadian poetry. He, under the obvious influence of T. S. Eliot, had adopted the myth of life, death and resurrection as the organizing principle of his poetry. In Pratt's view, this was a viable methodology: "This quality [autumnal tones], however, distinguishes most of the characteristic poetry of the age, and one would expect to find a measure of it in any writer who is attempting to subject the world as it is now exists to an honest analysis."³ In "Words for a Resurrection"⁴ Kennedy demonstrates how the nature cycle is a manner of presenting social analysis:

Each pale Christ stirring underground
 Splits the brown casket of its root,
 Wherefrom the rousing soil upthrusts
 A narrow, pointed shoot,

And bones long quiet under frost
 Rejoice as bells precipitate
 The loud, ecstatic sundering,
 The hour inviolate.

This Man of April walks again --
 Such marvel does the time allow --
 With laughter in His blessed bones,
 And lilies on His brow.

In the poem death and resurrection have been linked with the nature cycle of death and rebirth. The poet, by making this correlation, has transposed the nature cycle into a larger context of man's spiritual death and resurrection. There is no fear of physical death for "This Man of April walks again." It is not only the Christ referred to; "Each pale Christ" breaks the casket and emerges to a new life [underlining mine]. The analysis that Pratt refers to is the dissection of the world to reveal a basis or continuum that is not reliant on metaphysics. W. E. Collin, in The White Savannahs, supports this observation: "he [Kennedy] has made us look upon present life as a continuation of the past history of the race; he has enriched human experience by 'widening the domain of reality,' as Eliot has taught us to say."⁵

Perhaps this point is better seen in "Self-Epitaph:
 To be Carved in Salt."

His heart was brittle;
 His wits were scattered;
 He wrote of dying
 As though life mattered.
 (The Shrouding, p. 41)

The paradox of writing about death to explain life forces something new into the words of this poem. It is not a poem of sorrow nor, at the other end of the scale, bitter irony. The tone is light, sustained by monosyllabic words that carry a deceptively simple rhythm. Kennedy is master of his medium. He focuses the essence of his philosophy in these lines. By writing of "dying", the poet expands reality beyond the consciousness of everyday life. Certainly life matters. But the "larger reality" includes what is to Kennedy the reality of spiritual life. Throughout his work there is a focus on the union or the inextricable link of life and death that incorporates in a single thought the whole spectrum of human experience. Through myth Kennedy finds a medium that allows him, as Pratt said, to "subject the world . . . to an honest analysis." It is not so much the use of myth to examine a metaphysical system but the establishment of an order that is based in nature and not subject to the fickleness of man. Nature is constant. It is predictable and can be seen. Orthodox religion is invisible. It requires no empirical evidence. In a world where values seem so arbitrary, Kennedy needed a stasis. He found it not in metaphysics but in the physical world. Too much stress has been laid on Kennedy's work as being imitative of Eliot, the seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets and derived from Sir James Frazer's description of the Adonis myth in The Golden Bough.⁶ What is most striking in his poetry, a perspective that as yet has only been superficially examined, is the social implication. Collin touches on this facet:

And Kennedy, who has had his Catholicism uprooted, can embalm corpses and ferret among dead bones because he is still gazing with young-eyed wonder at the Resurrection. His emotionally realistic art, in the present transitional stage of its development, has a more intimately social significance because the vision has been translated into terms of the human crisis; because at bottom he has known want and passionately believes in another social order when this is ended.⁷

Collin does not explain further. What he means, for example, by "human crisis" is unclear. It seems that the crisis is whether or not man can adjust to the demands of an entirely new age. Kennedy overthrew the doctrinaire explanation of the Catholic church because he could not explain man's reaction to man in terms of a rationale that did not recognize that life had changed. The poem "Litany for These Days" first published in the October 1931 edition of Canadian Forum (later reproduced in the "Outcry on the Time" section of The Shrouding) is Kennedy's statement on the irresponsible optimism and culture that led to the 1929 depression:

Lily of the marshes, rooted in mire and slime,
 Drab-petalled, musk-scented, lapped by no tide,
 Virgin polluted, emblem of death in life,
 Flower with miasmic breath,
 Mottled flower of decay,
 Flower enshrined in corruption,
 Flower latticed by dry reeds,
 Blooming in secret, fated to rot obscurely . . .

Pray for us, O most foetid blossom.
 Pray for our souls, spiritless as thy marshes,
 Pray for our virtues, stagnant as thy waters
 Pray for our sins, lifeless as thy sap.

Here the "foetid blossom" is hope. It is hope because it only can pray for "our souls" from its bed of "corruption".

The scene is a wasteland, but it is very different than Eliot's description and, for that matter, A. J. M. Smith's portrayal in such a poem as "Shadows There Are".⁸ In Kennedy's wasteland there is water. And there is hope. The "Lily" is rooted "in mire and slime", the area where evolution began. There is an irony here that these marshes are "lapped by no tide". Natural evolution began in saline marshes. Since the corruption of man, evolution is not quite so natural. By altering the evolutionary situation in this way, Kennedy saves his vision from the charge of unwarranted optimism. Resurrection is possible but one must immerse himself in the "mire and slime" to rise above it. Kennedy has found the "Flower enshrined in corruption". Its sap is "lifeless". Its odor is "foetid", "miasmatic". It is a "flower of decay". Yet this flower is salvation; a salvation that L. A. MacKay did not find. Kennedy's poetry is highly emotional whereas MacKay's intellectual skepticism is itself a substitute that makes him superior to the environment. MacKay found a weapon in skepticism to battle the spiritual wasteland of the 1930's. Kennedy found a flower. Presently it is "flower of decay" but as the seasons progress, the flower will be reborn. As the flower is an "emblem of death in life" it is symbolic of the larger reality that joins physical and spiritual life before and after death. That is, the flower, in human terms, has a spiritual existence that transcends its present "polluted" state. It is no product of man. Nature will revitalize the flower and the flower will "Pray for our souls" with new and pure vigor.

E. K. Brown's cursory study of Kennedy is quite perceptive. Brown complains that Kennedy is too narrow, that he is a romantic saved from being a "pure romantic" only by the influence of A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott.⁹ Kennedy concurs with Brown in this note about his own work:

My own single book of verse reverts by way of Smith and Eliot to something of the matter of the metaphysicians. It is all about the fertility myth and rites of imitative magic that you find in Frazer's Golden Bough, in a Canadian dress. This preoccupation with abstractions of death and rebirth really resulted in a few poems of some sensibility. However, these are entirely subjective and lack contact with the larger reality.¹⁰

It is probably accurate to say that Kennedy did "lack contact with the larger reality" especially from the retrospect of 1936 or Brown's comment in 1943. At these times, the nature of poetry had changed in accord with the alteration in life that occurred during the depression years and the promise of even greater turmoil to follow. Reality or the perception of reality had changed. After 1935 or thereabouts poets, notably Dorothy Livesay and F. R. Scott, turned to Marxism in search of a reality that was rooted in economics and politics. They considered the quest that Kennedy indulged in as passé. But it must be remembered that Kennedy's environment in the late 1920's was as conducive to his search for reality as was the environment of post-1935 suited to the particular vision of Livesay and Scott. Attitudes changed and so did poetry. To be accurate in assessing the validity of Kennedy's art, one must be cognizant of the fact that terms and values change. E. K. Brown is correct to suggest that Kennedy was romantic;

he is incorrect in suggesting by the term "pure romantic" that Kennedy was out of touch with the reality that was so evident to the post-depression poets. The poet who wrote "Epithalamium Before Frost", for example, was different from the man who wrote "Calling Eagles" (see Appendix B for both poems). Here is range both in form and content. "Epithalamium Before Frost" is joyous, romantic and beautiful. The poet is enraptured with nature and he lets his mind caress all those things that are beautiful. This poem is very different from the promise that the poet hurls in "Calling Eagles". By 1937 Kennedy was a disillusioned man. He had forsaken the search for beauty and claimed to focus henceforth on the harsh search for truth. In the two examples cited the range of Kennedy's sensibility is evident. Indeed the poems of The Shrouding are narrow in range. The point remains, however, that Kennedy could and did write poetry of varied range and depth. The fault of criticism has been to accept the 'homogeneity clause' too quickly. Critics are eager to condemn the poetry of a period as facile or unrelated to reality because from their pinnacle of remove they can indulge their ethnocentric bias. To be honest is to evaluate what is lasting. Leo Kennedy's poetry is lasting through its unique circumstance and aspiration. This is to suggest that there is a progression in Kennedy's work that defines the stimuli affecting the poet's creativity. It is my contention that the quasi-romantic poems from The Shrouding are as valid an interpretation of reality as is Dorothy Livesay's Day and Night.

Early in his career, Kennedy's romanticism was in tune with the dynamic activity of the 1920's. His poetry reflected the sensibility of a young, untried warrior. Visions of Christ and the resurrection permeated his thought. There was an optimism. In "October Frost" Kennedy says

. . . I shall think of the dead:
Of gaunt unresurrected sons of God,
Crocus bulbs parched and patient under sod.

In these lines there is an obvious equation between the "Crocus bulbs", the "unresurrected sons of God", and the "dead". When this equation is seen in terms of "Self-Epitaph" the principle of Kennedy's thought is more evident. The concept of continuity in life and death, of the nature of spirituality, of hope, of talking of "dying as though life mattered" is seen as a qualified optimism. The crocus bulbs lie under the "bleached bones of summer", a wasteland somewhat like Eliot's description in The Four Quartets. The land is dry but there is water promised. Eliot's water is more obviously spiritual than Kennedy's, but Kennedy arrives at hope through a much less complex maze than does Eliot. Each poet has a success. Eliot's intricate abstractions on time and the journey involve the reader in more than a quest for hope. He is searching for a definable path through the complexities of metaphysics to arrive at a credible "sea". Kennedy's aspirations are less ambitious. "October Frost" (see Appendix B) finds Eliot's "sea" in the knowledge that the "crocus" will bloom in the spring. Whereas Eliot's complexities shroud the movement of his thought, Kennedy's simplicity makes his

insight the more convincing by its robust energy. This, of course, does not mean that Kennedy is a better poet than Eliot! What is suggested, is that Kennedy had the energy, simplicity and insight to present ideas in such a way that they exerted a considerable influence on his contemporaries. A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott were two notable examples. It is probable that Smith was the initial proponent of myth and metaphysics in Canadian poetry. But this poet never produced a verse so well defined as that of Leo Kennedy.

Kennedy, as W. E. Collin says, found the Myth and was able to present his vision in a way that greatly surpassed the efforts of Smith. Smith's interest in metaphysics and myth is seen in the poems "Prothalamium"¹¹ and "The Circle"¹² and further evidence in his article "A Note on Metaphysical Poetry".¹³

F. R. Scott, although much less interested in myth than Kennedy and Smith, at least gives evidence of its influence in "March Field" and "Calvary".¹⁴ In addition to the concern of these well known poets, the west coast critic A. M.

Stephen said that "Only one, Leo Kennedy, shows any sign of emerging from this land of shadows into a fruitful recognition of reality. There is promise in his work".¹⁵ This "land of shadows" seemingly refers to the complexities of myth. If this is so, it is difficult to understand why Mr. Stephen should be so concerned with the poets' withdrawal from an image that they find most appropriate to express their sensibilities. It is not as if all the poems of Scott, Smith and Kennedy dealt with the wasteland. Mr. Stephen's point is forced as he is building a straw-man that the avant garde critic can

tear down and stand as an example to the poets, leading them to the enlightened path. Indeed, Mr. Stephen says "It [recent poetry] has caught the vision of a new age and a new earth. It needs the inspiration and guidance which can only be given to it by creative criticism" ¹⁶ At this point in Canadian literature, however, poets and critics were usually one and the same. The poetry and criticism of Leo Kennedy were a major influence urging art that was concerned with reality, with becoming attuned to the age. It was an age, as A. J. M. Smith put it, of change:

The whole movement, indeed, is a movement away from an erroneous but comfortable stability, towards a more truthful and sincere but certainly less comfortable state of flux. Ideas are changing, and therefore manners and morals are changing. ¹⁷

Kennedy's poetry did deal with change. It perhaps was not the change associated with social realism but it was concerned with what Kennedy later called cultural survival.

In an article titled "Direction for Canadian Poets" published in 1936, Leo Kennedy said "It is my thesis that the function of poetry is to interpret the contemporary scene faithfully; to interpret especially the progressive forces in modern life which alone stand for cultural survival". ¹⁸ In such a poem as "Gravedigger's Rhapsody" (see Appendix B) published in 1930, Kennedy approaches the problem of death, metaphysics and the validity of his natural cycle system. This section subtitled "DISCOURSE METAPHYSICAL" will demonstrate:

Metaphysicians place the soul upon a platter.

Small owls and flitter mice conspire to utter
 The body's last abasement; these assert
 With careful malice that the dying shudder
 The body from the soul, and then revert
 By way of worms and rot to their prenatal
 Dissolubility, and resurrect
 Within the stems of crow-weed or of sorrel,
 As the matrices of the soul elect.

At which shout men of God, in contradiction
 Of such frail heresy, rise from their knees
 To shrill a theological conviction --
Most hideously clad in black are these!

Small flitter mice, and owls, and men of peace,
 Screaming their metaphysics without cease.¹⁹

The last line of this quotation indicates Kennedy's stand on metaphysics. The poet condones idle speculation of "stout men of God" answering the "frail heresy" of owls and mice by shrilling "theological convictions". In the poem there is a conviction that unites all life -- "I cry welcome to the worm my sister". There is no sense of death as a finality for the poet knows that the "tall palace of my flesh shall be / Rebuilt for a stranger". The poet is searching for a sense of contunuum after death that is not reliant upon metaphysics. As was earlier discussed in this paper, Kennedy rejected the metaphysics of Catholicism for a system that had a physical basis.²⁰ It is an attempt to comprehend beyond the rational -- or as Otto Rank calls it, beyond psychology²¹-- in terms that give credence to happenings in the empirical world. Kennedy's experience is an insight into 'mundane metaphysics'. This comment by Otto Rank may elucidate matters:

Man is born beyond psychology and he dies beyond it but he can live beyond it only through vital experience of his own -- in religious terms, through revelation, conversion or re-birth.²²

It may be agreed then, that Kennedy was interested in the irrational -- the irrational defined as phenomena not explainable in terms of what is commonly held to be true. F. W. Watt writes that in the production of such works as Leo Kennedy's "Life's like a garbage can", "the marks of psychological and sociological realism . . . appear as never before".²³

Kennedy may have approached "psychological realism" but the quest for reality could not totally destroy his Catholicism. Finding a correlative in the natural cycle of the seasons for the resurrection of Christ was an attempt at manifest metaphysics. But it is evident throughout his poetry that the raison d'être of Catholicism, the need for immortality, holds sway over all other considerations. The contrarational explanations of the Church attempted to make that which is unknown a part of the inexplicable nature of divinity. Feeling displaced reason as theologians attempted to explain such concepts as immortality as being a part of the belief that Christ, as the perfect man, died and was resurrected for the salvation of man. Such explanations may have sufficed for the laity, but a man of Leo Kennedy's intellectual stature recognized that there was no way of proving the immortality of the soul in rational terms. Indeed Kennedy's system is not so much a way of approaching immortality in a pragmatic way, but more an emotional rendition of

the concept. That he did find the nature cycle applicable is the more appropriate as it further lessened the abstractness of the notion. Kennedy, it seems, needed a system that explored "beyond psychology" without violating the laws of logic or empiricism. In the previously quoted "DISCOURSE METAPHYSICAL", the "frail heresy" referred to is, in Catholic terms, the heretical explanation of the soul's immortality. Kennedy envisioned body and soul as vital things. The soul became a "matrix", fertile, that is resurrected in "crow-weed or sorrel". Unlike conventional Christianity, Kennedy finds the soul continuing in the natural world. He has a sense of continuation; a gestalt sense such that a division between spiritual and rational is unnatural. By establishing such methodology to demonstrate this feeling of immediacy and continuation, Kennedy refuses to compromise his sensibility. This sestet from the sonnet "Mendelian Theory" is a statement of Kennedy's sense of a continuum:

Not from myself alone, but from some ghost
 Whose loins have ceased to quicken, shall ensue
 The dubious life of which I now am lost
 To walk this ancient earth and find it new --
 And redeposit seed, whereof the fruit
 Will pattern every dim andestral root.
 (The Shrouding, p. 8)

"Learn to be different"²⁴ he tells his soul to protect itself from those "Screaming their metaphysics without cease". Kennedy did not want to be at the mercy of forces that he could not see. He wished to explain, to discover forces that would influence his soul before and after death within a frame of reference not reliant upon what Christianity calls

inexplicable. Nor did he find permanence in human values. Nature was to be trusted for it was constant and visible. In this sense, Kennedy exemplifies the reaction of man against, in the broadest sense of the word, his environment. The fast easy life of the 1920's and the desperation of the "dirty thirties" were ripe for reaction. The influence of Kennedy's reaction as demonstrated by the comments of E. K. Brown, E. J. Pratt and W. E. Collin, should not be underestimated.

Kennedy's system is not intellectual. It is a seeking of truth that incorporates both rational and irrational forces. In "Calling Eagles" (see Appendix B), a 1937 poem, Kennedy's emotion rages against the rise of Fascism and the gross injustices in Ethiopia and Brazil. Here the "Eagle" "With noble talons arched for the scrap of truth" must leave his place of remove. He will come "to the valley where life is and verdure" not to mutter a cynical laugh and rise again, but to fight. He will immerse himself in the "turmoil", his "strong beak" and "thundering wings" forcing "the clean flight of the mind and the sharp perception". This poem is not a philosophical diatribe against fascist politics or individual right. It is an emotional appeal to recognize that the Eagle is searching for truth. The Eagle here is the poet. He is the just champion "sifting fact from suppose", carrying the torch of reality and justice. Yet for the Eagle "There is only a glacial death on the lonely crags". Kennedy realizes that he is alone, that he may harangue all he likes but the general antipathy of the populace will not be moved. The poet is a realist in 1937. Earlier in his career, such poems

as "Blind Girl", "The Captive"²⁵ (see Appendix B) and "Mad Boy's Song" carried not so much his anger but his wonder that there was cruelty in the world. They are poems that have none of the fire of "Calling Eagles". The comparison between "Calling Eagles" and "The Captive" is a good example of how Kennedy adapted to changing concepts of the nature of reality. "The Captive", written before 1933, describes a bird with "clipped wings" that as yet has no audible voice. It is a poem of mild protest, of a hesitant longing that a "fluid voice" can "flourish" in and finally dispell the "prison air". Reality is not harsh; it has not yet imposed itself upon the poet's sensibility and forced him to battle the prison. By 1937 the poet faces the new reality of depression and war. His poetry reflects the change with Eagles instead of birds with clipped wings. The Eagle does not sing, he screams and tears with beak and talon until reality in all its sordidness is bare. Never before writing "Calling Eagles" had Kennedy's emotion been turned to such savagery. Very few of the poems in The Shrouding achieve any real power except in a strange emotional way. He can produce joyous poetry as in "Words for a Resurrection" or reticent passion in "Exeunt Without Sennet" (The Shrouding, p. 51)²⁶ but no demonstrative power. Perhaps it is the major fault in his work that he did not find sufficient range of thought and force of expression. At best he is a low-key poet, who, without the intellectual toughness of Eliot, cannot create enough variety of emotion to make his art solid.

A close examination of "Anguish Outworn" (see Appendix

B) will demonstrate most aspects of Kennedy's style and thought while also serving as a point on which to judge his achievement. In his book Poetry In Canada, R. E. Rashley comments that the poetry of the 1930's became focused "on the organization of life and the concept of man on which a fruitful society might be developed."²⁷ More specifically, he says that "Leo Kennedy and Patrick Anderson show an inability to reconcile religion and experience, which remain in conflict."²⁸ Kennedy says:

-- This the unmercy, that a witless force
Should pause and plunder, nor resume its course
Till it has prised the lips and drawn the soul
With anguish from the frail enveloping whole . . .

This the grim irony, that brain and bone
Should have no subtler value than a stone.
(The Shrouding, p. 30)

The conflict between religion and experience that Rashley talks about does not seem to be an intellectual crisis. In "Anguish Outworn", Kennedy gives credence to the fact that religious solace is a convention. Yet in the concluding stanza of the poem Mary who is equated with the mourning woman, does not hear Jesus's "Come forth Lazarus"; "she only hears the rattling of a hearse." The experience of death in the myth of death and resurrection is merely a stage in a continuum if one is to believe that "This Man of April walks again." But Kennedy finds that the realism of the mourning woman's anguish, whether hypocritical or not, over-shadows the promise of resurrection. This implies that Kennedy is not intellectually convinced that his system is viable. Emotion-

ally the poet can speak of the "orbit of the tomb" even though the woman affirms the "fiat of mortality" with her handkerchief. Mortality is cheap. The whole funeral process is a facade with "rented purple hangings" over the "torn wall paper." Mary is denied by Jesus. Lazarus is allowed to die in the true "pomp and circumstance of matter." Kennedy asserts the primacy of vegetable life because it does not need to affirm mortality. It is a cycle where mortality and immortality exist coincidentally. Somehow the wasteland of corruption must be made meaningful. There is a point beyond which man must come to terms with his need for immortality and the denial of that need, experienced by the woman mourning for her husband. In an article on Archibald Lampman, Kennedy explains this tension:

We are all impatient of reading into the face of nature the conservative policies of Anglican omnipotence. We are principally concerned with the poetry of ideas and emotional conflicts. We have detected . . . that all is decidedly not right in the world; we suspect that God is not in his Heaven. Uncertain of ourselves, distressed by our inability to clarify our relationship to these and comparative issues, we do not feel superior to circumstances at all.²⁹

Kennedy, then, must manipulate circumstances so that his analysis of the world is not left chaotic. He needs to reorganize those things that he finds true to promote a world that will permit the survival of man. In a situation where values are nebulous and traditions no longer offer unity, speculation such as Kennedy indulges in with myth, becomes a spiritual necessity. To maintain balance, both rational and irrational must be recognized. Through myth Kennedy finds a basis for stability.

Kennedy's technical virtuosity is equal to the task of communicating his sensibility. The most impressive of his achievements is his ability to create an emotional situation -- as in "Anguish Outworn" -- and sustain or vary it as the subject of the poem dictates. W. E. Collin praises "Words for a Resurrection" in these terms: "I know of no Canadian poem in which there is such absolute and beautiful blending of thought and feeling, such amazing unity of being."³⁰ The last stanza of "Anguish Outworn" is a good example of how accurately Kennedy controls his verse.

Frozen with sorrow, Mary sits alone
and thinks of Lazarus within the stone,
her brother, silent in a winding sheet
awaiting Christ, awaiting the fall of feet
awaiting the whispered, Come forth, Lazarus,
she hears only the rattling of a hearse.

The first four lines of this stanza are cadence-like, halting, as if the speaker were under a deep emotional strain. There is an "s" sound in "Frozen", "sorrow", "sits", "Lazarus", "stone", "silent" and "sheet" that reinforces "sorrow", the most important word in the first line. The "s" sound does not dominate the tone. Combined with it is the assonance of "o" and "a" in, for example, "Frozen" and "sorrow". This softer sound tempers the sibilance and retards the swift movement of speech so often found in accumulated "s" sounds. Even on the most basic technical level, Kennedy has created a tension between sounds: a tension that is combined with the expectancy of discovering what is the "sorrow". As the sounds of the words create mood, so does the sound focus upon

certain words in a line. In each of the lines, a personal noun or pronoun is the emphatic word. In the fourth line there is a preponderance of assonance. The only word not characterized by "a" and "aw" sounds is "Christ". The position of "Christ" between "awaiting" and "awaiting" with a punctuated pause after "Christ" sets this word off from the rest of the sentence. Attention is focused on the "k" sounds that jar the quiet rhythm. The effect of focusing attention on "Christ" is twofold. First the reader's mind is led to the various associations of Christ and his divinity. This is a stock response, the response conjured up by an archetype. The second and more important effect is that "Christ" becomes the focus of the ironic last line. The reader sympathises with Mary and awaits Christ's command that Lazarus should arise. The focus is on "Christ" for he can dispel Mary's sorrow. Instead of a benediction Mary hears only the "rattling of a hearse". In this instance it is evident that Kennedy's control over his medium is par excellence. He has drawn this short stanza into a tightly-knit finale that is a most fitting conclusion to the poem.

To support the conclusions arrived at in the analysis of the short final stanza of "Anguish Outworn" it will do well to examine the images and tensions of the whole poem. The first four lines of the poem, separated from the regular text by italics, as is the concluding six line section, set the mood quickly and concisely. The first line mentions "funeral flowers", announcing the subject, death. The second line contains the interesting phrase "orbit of the tomb" which is

puzzling until we reach "Lazarus prefigured" in line three. Then the associations meld into a general remembrance of the Christ, Mary, Lazarus story in the Bible (John 11). So the general tenor of the poem is set by the first three lines of this four line beginning. The fourth line is almost too subtle. Lazarus lies "within an anteroom". This suggests very obliquely that Christ who is charged with the responsibility of Lazarus' death, is a sort of monarch who keeps his subjects waiting in an "anteroom". Needless to say, this is a shade off the orthodox description of Christ's humility. Finally, then, there is a basic tension set up. The reader has the basis of the poem through Lazarus, a suggestion of what Kennedy means by "orbit of the tomb" and a vague uneasiness that all is not so right.

As we move into the first regular type stanza, we become more involved in the complexities that Kennedy weaves around the central story. The second word of the first stanza is "alien" and it is used to describe the attitude of the mourners. This word in conjunction with the last line of the stanza suggests, with sort of a mysterious quaver, that something is not right in the funeral home. The poet is scattering words and ideas lightly through the scene which trip up the reader's flow of concentration. In the second stanza, for example, there is a vagueness of detail that focuses on tone. The lines "Their feet have shuffled hesitantly through / The widow's soul" coupled with the cotton handkerchief as the "fiat of mortality" create a mood of frowning disbelief. The general movement of the lines is

properly solemn in accordance with the scene. But there is a constant tinge of unease that is brought more to the fore in stanza three. The words "testifying" and "debt" suggest a legal trial where all accounts are processed to balance the ledger. There is no nobility in death. It is celebrated with "rented purple hangings . . . / Over the torn wallpaper". At this point, including stanzas four and five, the poet has established the myth of Lazarus as his organizing principle, suggested the ugliness of death and planted enigmatic, cryptic phrases that do not really have any point. So far it has been up to the reader to accept or reject the quite random movement of the poem. If the reader has lasted to stanza six the point of the poem will no longer be so elusive. The first couplet of stanza six makes a very important equation between "matter", referring to the corpse, and the "bloom". Each had life and each died. The only difference is the bloom will again live whereas the resurrection of the "material" lies in Christ's hands. Then we move through the tremendously effective image of the sympathy cards with "damaged ends" to stanza seven and eight where the poet's anger and realization of the "grim irony" bring the poem to its emotional climax. The irony is not that "bone" and "stone" have similar values but that the "bone" is valueless without its animating soul. And the departure of the soul is not the purpose of the ceremony for we have been told that "The focus of her being becomes small and narrow". She thinks of her sorrow at being deserted while the mourners in stanza nine mutter facile comments on destiny. The soul of the dead

man, his immortality, is not discussed and little thought about. There is a tragedy in the story that is played against the "dingy" attitude of the mourners. The tragedy is that Mary hopes tremulously that her Lazarus will be uplifted. She must live yet she must recognize that death has touched her. Kennedy sees her consternation as that of weak religiosity. She would not be aware of the "grim irony", that "brain and bone / Should have no subtler value than a stone". Her anguish will find no solace for never does Christ say "Come forth" to her Lazarus. She only hears the reality and finality of death.

This poem is not Kennedy's best. It is rather loosely structured and its subject does not totally encompass the spectrum of his thought as do some other poems. What it is important for is to demonstrate just what Kennedy's attitudes are. For example some critics such as Collin say Kennedy enjoys death while others such as Brown say that he fears it and finds it sordid. From this poem we can see that death is neither feared nor enjoyed. It is tragic. But that tragedy can be eased if people would not persist in believing that everyone is Lazarus and that Christ will be along directly to resurrect them. The myth is important but, in Kennedy's terms, it will only work when it has a visible basis as do the bloom and its seasonal resurrection. Essentially it is an emotional poem. The facts of death are not intellectually examined. Rather, the funeral situation is filtered through Kennedy's sensibility until its emotional cast is such that its relation in words is adequate to the emotion. Even the

quasi-philosophical comment on the force of death is more an emotional outcry than an intellectual development of destiny and man's helplessness. The myth of death and resurrection is a spiritual absolute for Kennedy. In the absolute he has found a control for the aridness of a spiritual wasteland.

From this study of Leo Kennedy's poetry it is evident that he was reacting against forces that could not offer any viable solace. Catholicism was not sufficient as Kennedy could not accept the attitude that listed those things not easily explained as inexplicable and attached them to the nature of divinity. As was shown, Kennedy tried to find reality. He could not be satisfied with merely rational reality so he joined rational and irrational in natural terms and images. From this conception he had an empirical point of reference to extend into the explanation of immortality. Reality at this time was the object of his quest. The myth and his speculations upon death, love and resurrection were the means through which Kennedy hoped to separate reality and illusion. From the evidence of his poems it is not plausible to say that he ever achieved his purpose. Reality as an absolute is a notoriously elusive pursuit. What Kennedy did find, at least in part, was a formula for cultural survival. That is not to say that he discovered the panacea for all conflict. What is suggested is that Kennedy succeeded in finding a belief at a time when the flux of human values encouraged skepticism as an explanation. Leo Kennedy was a reactionary in much the same sense as L. A. MacKay. Kennedy was a product of the 1920's that seemed so easy yet in 1929 turned

so black. His environment certainly influenced the adoption of a system that transcended the dangers of human destruction. In the same way, his example of rebellion and innovation influenced his environment. A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott attempted the same road as Kennedy but it is very significant that, as Collin and Stephen point out, Kennedy was the superior artist, the man who might ultimately find that larger reality. Unfortunately the pressures of the depression and the rise of world strife in the mid 1930's turned Kennedy into a bitter, disillusioned man. He wrote very little after 1936 and in that year he left Canada for the United States. This, as was seen with L. A. MacKay, was, almost a typical Canadian reaction. The trauma of having all one's values and hopes undercut by economic vagaries and fluctuating moral values forced such men as Kennedy and MacKay to deny their artistic aspirations. The artistic recession of the early 1930's could not cope with negativism. The result of these social upheavals led Leo Kennedy to cease writing just at that time when he showed the most promise.

CHAPTER III

RAYMOND KNISTER

It is significant that the dedication in Leo Kennedy's book of poems reads:

For

RAYMOND KNISTER

one year dead.¹

To Leo Kennedy and to Dorothy Livesay, Knister seemed to "epitomize the struggle of a generation".² It was a generation, as we have seen in the work of L. A. MacKay and Leo Kennedy, of flux where the ease of the 1920's left men little prepared for the holocaust of the thirties. Dorothy Livesay describes these years succinctly:

Canada, in the twenties, was coming to grips more seriously than ever before with the idea of nationhood. In material aspects unhurt by the war, the early depression years were imperceptibly flung off, as a bad dream fades on waking. There was a feeling of boom in the air, a quest for excitement which, however, had none of the carnival cynicism about it which attacked American life and literature. We are not a boisterous people, nor given to extremes. We had been brought much closer, culturally, to the United States, but bouts of cynicism like Hemingway's were not adolescent meat: we repudiated them for a more robust romanticism. All that was positive in the imagist movement in poetry, all that was realistic in prose like Dos Passos' -- this had appeal and influence. ("Memoir", p. xix)

Knister, even more than Kennedy and MacKay, saw himself as

sort of a priest-artist who was to demonstrate the tensions of his world. Such a mission was to organize life, to find truth so that men could appreciate more the beauty and vitality of their world. Unfortunately, only the skepticism of L. A. MacKay was of sufficient toughness to repel, at least in part, the despair brought about by the great economic depression. Knister's manifesto was: "that we need not understand. We do not understand life, nor great art which is its essence. Enough if we see its mystery and beauty"3

This caliber of thought was not sufficient to deal with the trauma of total dissolution. It was the struggle of a generation to exist, as artists and as men. Survival became even more difficult for Knister. Kennedy could reject his vision when he found that it was no longer applicable to the reality of the thirties. But Knister was in every sense married to his dream. As Dorothy Livesay points out, Knister found his hero in John Keats:

He [Knister] also found in Keats the man the same urge to fight against obstacles thrown in his path, to hold fast to the vision and express it at all costs: this, coupled with Keats's unaccountable despondency, listlessness, and yearning for death. ("Memoir", p. xxxiii)

With the ideal of Keats before him, it becomes increasingly evident that Knister was surely moving toward self-annihilation. According to Knister's dream, a young death was a noble self-sacrifice in refusal to compromise his artistic sensibility to the vulgarity of earning by it a living. The circumstances of this man's death must certainly go beyond 'accidental death by drowning'.

The acknowledged imagist credo is to place the object before the reader with an absolute minimum of embellishment. That is, the poet must capture the essence of his subject in the most austere terms so that the reader, in seeing the artist's report, will have aroused in himself the same emotion experienced by the poet. This concept of poetry, first stated by T. E. Hulme and later expounded by such poets as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, was adopted by Knister as the vehicle through which he could best communicate the true feeling of farm life. In the farm, Knister saw life forces very close to the surface. Man, beast and nature were in intimate communion so that the poet need only describe the scene to make the forces self-evident. These first few lines of "The Colt" show Knister's delicate touch:

THROUGH the gate
 The boy leads him,
 Turns him, expectant,
 Around;
 Slips off the halter:
 He whirls, is gone --
 Boy brandishing
 The halter at his going,
 Clapping his hands --
 Unnecessary --

(Collected Poems, p. 15)

The first two lines have a gentle, unhurried quality. Soft vowel sounds and regular rhythm combine to lull the reader, preparing him for the contrasting alliteration of "Turns" and "expectant". The effect is one of conscious motion as the boy and colt know what is to happen. There is a terseness created by the very short lines, liberally punctuated. A sense of entrapment soon to be loosed is the reader's focus

as the moment of release approaches haltingly. Then the halter is off and the horse wheels away. Dashes after "gone", "hands" and "Unnecessary" enforce a sense of flow, of freedom that can never be captured in words. The final dash carries the motion of the horse back to the boy who, in the picture, is standing quietly by the gate watching the colt. Here Knister very subtly contrasts the freedom of the colt to the implied confinement of the boy who is left holding the halter. At the end of the poem, the farmer voices the sense that Knister has suggested:

The farmer looks over his fence
To see him pass;
And his world,
And its days, make him say:
"Idle colts!
Somehow nohow of any use!"

Even on this most basic level the reader knows how envious the farmer is of the colt's natural freedom. There is a basic equation at the beginning of the poem between the colt and boy but the introduction of the farmer in the final lines stresses that the boy will lose his affinity to the colt. This point is central to Knister's thought. In "Ambition" (Collected Poems, pp. 18-19) the climbing children are commanded to "Get right down" and the poet had "just begun / To climb up the other ladder". Freedom is not man's lot, says Knister. The horses may have "blistered shoulders" but worse, man has "Thoughts" ("In the Rain, Sowing Oats", Collected Poems, p. 4). The resultant effect of this thought is one of envy. However much the poet may cherish his thought, he will always feel at odds with the nature that accepts the

colt's freedom but will not allow man the same.

This basic tension between man and his environment is central to all of Knister's poems. In the poems "The Plowman" (Collected Poems, p. 3) and "Plowman's Song" (Collected Poems, p. 26) the tension becomes more personal than in "The Colt". The plowman tries to turn a perfect furrow that has not been "warped" by "A stone, a root, a stray thought". Always, though, there is some imperfection even near the end of the row where he looks back and finds that when he looked, he swerved. Before his "share" there is the "ultimate unflawed turning" that would also fulfill this wish from "Plowman's Song":

Turn under, plow,
My trouble;
Turn under griefs
And stubble.

The plowman must always look ahead so that "I shall turn the furrow of all my hopes." These lines suggest somewhat more than a simple description of a farmer trying to turn a perfect furrow. There is a sense that the furrow is more than a rut in the ground. The furrow is a path through obstacles such as "thoughts". In this light, the plowman becomes an image for the poet who is searching for a path through the complexities of "root" and "stone" and "thought". His furrow is the course of his life decided by his "share". Perfection is an uncorrupted view of reality so that everything in relation stands open to the poet's eye. The tension arises from the poet's ambivalent attitude towards the soil.

In "The Plowman" it is an impediment that frustrates his desire for perfection. But in "Plowman's Song", the soil seems to be a solace that will soothe and hide "griefs" and "trouble". In both cases the soil is passive and it is the artist who must wrestle with the soil to make it productive.⁴

Knister's attitude is not very simple or consistent. The "plow" in these two poems has been a useful instrument for defining the poet's path. It is much the same in his first published novel, White Narcissus (1929), where the writer finds the plow as a catharsis, eliminating the chaos of city life and reassociating him to the land. Richard Milne, the protagonist of the White Narcissus, returns to a farm to find a panacea for the complexities of city life. Like Knister, Milne had spent his youth on the farm. It was a place where life and manners were close to the surface. Milne re-establishes contact with farm life by taking his turn on the plow where he can reflect upon problems while being in direct communion with the land. He finds, though, that this way of life creates a tension. On one hand, he enjoys struggling with the plow but on the other hand, he discovers that his desire to write is frustrated. The plow is an image of choice. Milne uses the plow to cut through the complexities of living. The plow in the short story, "Mist-green Oats", however, is a tool of torture. Throughout this story, published in 1922, the boy is shown straining against the land. The struggle is a despairing one as the boy is not yet able to come to terms with the necessity of plowing. The plow is again an image of force, cutting a furrow through the land,

the basis of life. It is forever bucking through the rough ground, exhausting the boy to the point where he says "'What's the use? What's the weary use?'". The answer is that there is little use. The plow is a necessity or nothing productive will grow from the soil. In terms of the artistic process, we see Knister both loving and hating his role as plowman. He loves the feel of turning the furrow, of mastering the "plow" and forcing its share deep and straight. He hates the necessity, the drudgery of earning his living in this way. Knister actually did try to support himself by writing poetry and working on The Midland in Iowa City. After two or three successful years of writing, Knister left Iowa and returned in 1926, to Canada where he made a living of sorts by freelance writing for the Toronto Star and various other magazines. The sort of commercial writing and editing that he was forced to do, he considered a prostitution of his talent. A hint of this is included in this October 1927 letter:

The Star Weekly and R. K. seem to have taken different paths. As long as they would print fairly good stuff it wasn't so bad. But this year -- nothing I can send O'Brien, and the last articles have been unsigned
 ("Memoir", p. xxx)

At this time Knister was working on White Narcissus. He had begun to eliminate as much as possible the necessity of writing out of financial expediency and turned to a more ideal concept of art.

Before we examine Knister's changing concept of art, it will be helpful to give more attention to the tensions in his work and their origins. In "Cross-bred Colt" (Collected

Poems, p. 12) the conflict between man and beast is dramatically presented. The colt "gets its way / Among the bigger colts" but when it attempts the same thing with man it receives "a clip to its muzzle". Man will not accept the colt's superiority. As a colt, the animal has not yet taken its place in the structure of necessity. This tension becomes more complex when we consider that the horse is the force pulling the plow. In this sense, the horse is an intermediary between man and nature. Further, it is both a force that brings man in closer contact with the soil and a buffer between man and absolute union with the earth. So the horse becomes a symbol of three things: first it is an aid in the necessity of breaking the soil, second an animal somewhat envied for its freedom although closely linked to man's condition, third it is a naturally noble animal whose stoic nature is somehow outside man's concerns. All these functions operate in Knister's poetry creating another set of tensions that further complicate the poet's attitude toward his environment. In "A Row of Stalls" (Collected Poems, pp. 7-12) the almost anthropomorphic description of the horses illustrates these attitudes. Sam is the true stoic work-horse:

Sam was just a horse.
 Nothing happened to him
 Except long furrows,
 Pasture romps,
 And long days in the stall.

He is the horse of necessity and for his situation he is attacked by Lord Lochinvar. In contrast to Sam is the obvious nobility of Baron Balderston. He is sold to a horse-

man, "Attended and coddled by a brace of English valets, / Among his peers". The Baron is removed from the drudgery of labor in a quiet way whereas Nance is the horse who will not submit to man's attempts to 'break' her. Just what Knister's feelings are is hard to ascertain. He both loves horses and dislikes them for their remove. This is more clearly set forth in the short story, "The One Thing" where the farmer, a recluse, forsakes all social intercourse to tend his herd of horses. The horse, like the artist, is both closely associated with man yet removed from him by attitudes that remain mute and inexplicable. It is the tension created by such a recognition and close parallel to the artist's condition that provides another interesting insight into the nature of the artist.

Peter Stevens in an article titled "The Old Futility of Art" points out that "we can see the elements Knister admired in poetry, the element that he would try to reproduce in his own verse, was the subject within annotated by external circumstance, with a tension, explicit or implied, holding the poem in equilibrium."⁵ This, Stevens finds from comments made by Knister in articles on Archibald Lampman⁶ and Wilfred Campbell.⁷ The tenor of Stevens' argument is that the tension Knister feels is from within himself. Once a subject is located within the poet's being, he translates his personal experience into an external form, such as the boy and the colt. In T. S. Eliot's phrase, Knister found an "objective correlative" in actual situations to express the subject within himself. Since the actual situations are almost

invariably located in farm life and we can find recurring images that manifest the poet's attitudes, the reader is actually presented with a commentary on the poet's sensibility. The clue as to why Knister chose the particular "objective correlative" that he did is found in his article on "The Poetical Works of Archibald Lampman." In this article Knister states that nature is merely nature and man turns to nature because he is "sick with being man."⁸ The importance of this phrase is not to be underestimated. The increasing development of industrialism was not, as Dorothy Livesay noted, met with "bouts of cynicism like Hemingway's" ("Memoir", p.xix). Yet Knister did not always respond with the "more robust romanticisms" as in "The Motor: A Fragment" (Collected Poems, pp. 36-38):

In flashing sequence I see my brothers
 Drawn down toward me as by a magnet pulled,
 And I to them;
 Sharks in a coral sea bearing down upon the prey;

These lines show that Knister was concerned with his milieu. He responded to the materialistic stimuli of the twenties by turning to the natural world where at least there was some hope of transcending materialism. But Knister's attitude is enigmatic. His sharp vision saw the threat of "The Motor" but later in the poem his romantic nature holds sway:

Oh for the swift ride at night --
 Mile after joyous mile,
 Swift, and with splendid unleashed power
 That gives me joy
 A rut, a twist of the wheels,
 Swaying speed,
 And the pale terrible face of danger
 Just glimpsed, only the fairy grace of it seen . . .

This poem reveals the dichotomy of Knister's attitude toward his environment as being both a rejection and a fascination with the new age. It is further evidenced in his joining of a writer's club presumably for comradeship and to keep pace with new developments in art. Yet in a letter to Dorothy Livesay, William Colgate, a member of the writer's club, describes Knister as "not socially congenial". "He was", as Mr. Colgate goes on, "a negative rather than a positive personality".⁹ The poet, Raymond Knister, then, was not a man readily understood. Throughout his art and his life there was a fascinating duality in his attitudes to life, art, nature and death that epitomizes the struggle of a generation to come to terms with its environment.

The sense of envy for the natural world earlier mentioned is perhaps better seen in the poem "Dog and Cat" (Collected Poems, p. 17). The cat is attacked by a dog "But she, certain of the fence" demonstrates her feline prerogative by suggesting "I don't believe we've met before?" The dog responds to his mistake in calculation by ignoring her and "Barks at a passing truck". The potential of the conflict thwarted by the cat's refusal to join in, the dog "comes home / Gallantly / Tail in air". Apart from the masterful rendition of the situation, the reader is struck with the fine tension so delicately in balance in the poem. The boy in the "Cross-bred Colt" replies to the colt's gambols with a "clip to its muzzle". How much more unsatisfactory a solution it is to that arrived at between cat and dog. There is a nobility and understanding shared by the cat and dog that is

alien to the world where men take part. Even in "Ambition" the father responds to his childrens' play with the terse command "Get right down". Perhaps this is the mood that Knister feels in "After Exile" (Collected Poems, pp. 23-26) where, as he says of the poem: "I meant it to synthesize one individual reaction to the environment which represents his country."¹⁰ The connection between "Cat and Dog", "Ambition" and "After Exile" may be unclear until one recognizes that Knister's concept of environment is an internal one. It is a subjective response translated into an objective situation that is supposed to be impersonal. "After Exile", however, is personal to the extent that the reader sees the poet rather than the objective scene.

WAKING

This train spreads land
 After a gloom of intents teeming
 Turmoil of lost
 Streets,
 A world
 After chaos.

From the title of the poem and from the facts of his life we know that this poem was written upon Knister's return to Canada from the United States in 1926. The impression that these first lines give us is one of disillusionment. Knister had not found himself able to remain in a position where he could write poetry while being free and happy. Such a life was good but financially, Knister could not sustain himself. He has left "a gloom of intents teeming / Turmoil of lost / Streets" to return to "A world". It is not the picture of "chaos" that lasts but a man, a poet, returning. The object

becomes a vehicle into the poet. Inherent, though, is the tension of return.

Canada had been unreceptive to Knister's verse whereas in The Midland under the editorship of John Frederick he found "recognition", as Dorothy Livesay says, "if not fame and fortune." ("Memoir", p. xx). Knister surely recognized that Canada would offer little in the way of support for his writing. The tensions that were earlier discussed have shifted somewhat. Here the tension is between the artist and his environment, a tension that became increasingly powerful as Knister more and more saw himself as artist pursuing an ideal. Leo Kennedy's observations on Knister and his attachment to Canada are worth quoting at length.

Raymond Knister is an able writer in general, and a skillful novelist in particular. And he is genuinely a Canadian novelist in that he writes of the Canadian scene with understanding and feeling, though not pseudo-patriotic idealism, but because it is irrevocably a part of his conscious makeup. He does not exploit the Canadian background for mercenary purposes; he interprets it because he is of it; because his outlook on life is still largely that of the Canadian country boy behind the plough. By this I mean that he has retained a simplicity of judgment, a quality of unsophistication, to which is allied the factor of broad, inclusive observation. He has stored away a copious memory of the sights, sounds, and smells encountered daily, season by season, on the Ontario farm and countryside. He has remembered the ways of the people, their intimate problems and habits of mind. And writing the lives of these folk, he recreates honestly and plainly, each familiar impulse and motive, each rattle of harness and comment of corncake.¹¹

This article was written in 1932 only a few weeks before Knister's death. In it, Kennedy points out the value of Knister's work but fails to recognize how strongly he became attached to the idea of a pure artist.

Dorothy Livesay, who knew Knister well, points out that Knister was aware of his "too-great seriousness" about art. She goes on to say that "his passionate search for perfection began to dominate the more balanced view he had had, as shown in the above letter [Quoted on p. xxv of Miss Livesay's "Memoir"]". He began to think of himself as artist and nothing else. He was the chosen vessel, the interpreter of reality." ("Memoir", p. xxvi). These comments by Dorothy Livesay and Leo Kennedy were written about Knister around 1927, when he had given up writing poetry and turned seriously to writing prose. The same attitude, however, is seen in some of his poems although in a much reduced way. The final four line stanza of "Reply to August" (Collected Poems, pp. 29-30) suggests that the poet is more concerned with "I" and overtly, the poetic process.

I shall hear what the nights have told, --
 Another night
 When this heart is the word it is speaking
 In cloud's hush or starlight

This poem marks a move away from the subtleties of "The Plowman" as Knister wants to make his point more clear. In the letter referred to above, Knister says "Also I have been working at a couple of short stories. One is so slight a piece that every word must be just right or it won't be worth much." The perfection Knister strove for in his short story is that when "the heart is the word." While it is natural to suppose that an artist might be very cautious with his medium and probe for perfection, it is unnatural for an

artist to become so enraptured with perfection that he takes as his exemplar George Carver, an English professor at Iowa University, who re-wrote stories eighteen or nineteen times. It seems that by adopting such a method, he is indeed overcoming "the old futility of art" by transmitting sense without the "blight" of words.

Perhaps a more important aspect of Knister's concept of art is the longing for a moment of revelation. This idea is found in "October Stars" (Collected Poems, p. 31) and "Change" (Collected Poems, p. 38) where the poet muses about natural landscapes wondering when all the forces that he has sensed will be revealed before him. In "October Stars", revelation will be death:

Or did all these
And the tame apple-smell
Through the wind in your hair
Make me to long
For an end to life?

These lines indicate that the poet is strongly aware of the lesson of "Quiet Snow" (Collected Poems, p.33) that "There should be hurry." It is difficult to be very specific, but there is a strong undercurrent in Knister's work that carries this tragic sensibility. It is, as he says in "Change", a time when

You will be you yourself,
I'll find you more, not else,
For vintage of the woeful years.

There is a sense of urgency, that the artist must live his role. He must be an artist, someone upon whom the populace

relies for a glimpse of beauty and reality. The more intensely the artist lives the more powerful will be his experience. An awareness of the world's end makes simple things more poignant and revelation much closer:

The sea breathes, or broods, or loudens,
Is bright or is mist and the end of the world;
And the sea is constant to change.

I shall not wonder more, then,
But I shall know.

The moment of knowing is short and if not fully taken advantage of, death obliterates all. It is, as "Change" suggests, as if Knister were living in a sea of mists, constantly changing, where to know is to approach the end where the sea suddenly brightens. The play, Youth Goes West offers somewhat the same expression of Knister's increasingly tragic vision. The youth, Garland, has grown tired of farm life. He receives and accepts an offer to "go west". On his last day at his parents' farm, the youth is killed. His death came before he took advantage of the change and extricated himself from the "mist". Youth Goes West was first published in 1928 when Knister had foresaken poetry for a medium of expression that would reach a wider audience.¹² But the point here is to note the difference between the statements on death from "Change", 1922, "October Stars", 1923, Youth Goes West in 1928 and finally to My Star Predominant published post-humously in 1934. It is easily explained that nearly all poets treat death in their works. But it is interesting, to say the least, that Knister's increasing

concern with death can be chronicled; it was culminated in studies of Rilke and Keats just prior to his death.

Knister, it was mentioned earlier, was able to earn a precarious living by writing when he first returned to Canada in 1926. He wrote articles for various magazines and did some editing which led to the 1928 publication of Canadian Short Stories. He was married in 1927 and his child, Imogen, was born in 1931. So his financial commitments became greater as his interest in writing magazine articles decreased. All would have gone well, however, if Knister had been able to collect the one thousand dollar prize that his novel My Star Predominant had won in a contest run by the Graphic Press in 1931. Unfortunately the Graphic Press went bankrupt and Knister was unable to collect his prize. The novel, as Dorothy Livesay describes it, "is a paeon to beauty and death."

Perhaps, because he felt the same struggles within himself, Knister has recaptured the feverish sense of urgency which activated Keats in the four years leading to his death. He portrayed the poet as demanding the utmost of himself in his desire to deliver the vision of beauty to the world.
("Memoir", p. xxxiii)

Leo Kennedy also suggests that Knister identified with the tragic life of Keats: "he is drawing on himself rather than his reading, and modelling his subject in a way native to himself." Further, Dorothy Livesay comments about the general tenor of writers in the late twenties and early thirties:

Writers were beginning to take sides politically. Some were pushed to the wall without fully understanding what was happening to their world. Others, still economically secure,

began to participate intellectually in the world conflict of ideologies.

Knister's life fell in with these contradictions. He was one who had to suffer personally, yet who remained grimly determined to stay with his ambition.

("Memoir", p. xxxiv)

Knister, then, was seen by his contemporaries as a man who fully participated in the tragedy of the depression years. He was a victim of depression in that his ideal of art was not allowed because it was not financially viable. The environment of the twenties allowed Knister to believe that such an ideal was possible. He found that writing for a living, a total dedication to art was possible. When this situation was reversed by the depression, Knister was not able to re-arrange his thought. Financial problems such as he describes in a letter to his creditor Mr. H----- wore heavily on the poet:

It would be pleasant to go on and say that with my thanks I was returning the loan herewith. I cannot do so at the moment, and in view of the things that have happened to me in the interval, you may well expect an explanation.

("Memoir", p. xxxii)

The circumstances leading to and surrounding Knister's death do not make the suggestion of suicide implausible. While this suggestion may not seem to have any bearing on his art, it is an important point in demonstrating just how powerful an effect the depression had upon the artists of that time. Knister, financially destitute and compelled to pursue his career, left this impression on Dorothy Livesay:

He had already chosen. To save the integrity of his creative life he was willing, nay, he felt it necessary, to blot out

the obligations and compromises of everyday life. Before his marriage he had said in a letter: "I can't stop writing, even to get married." Now that decision, as he told me of it, had become much more intense.

("Memoir", p. xxxviii)

Working from the facts that Knister was reading Rilke who said that suicide is not a negative act but a self-sacrifice, that his marriage may not have been too happy, financial troubles made him desperate and life-insurance would alleviate the condition of his wife and child, and that this fanatical concern with art left him a little unbalanced and out of tune with reality, we begin to see a web of conditions ripe for suicide. All the ease which the twenties allowed was now crushed by the thirties. In August of 1932, Knister wrote to Dr. Lorne Pierce, editor of the Ryerson Press, "I wonder if you would mind advancing the fee for a couple of weeks. I could be in Toronto at the end of the month and finish the work. A reply by return mail would be appreciated, as I have not heard from my various ventures for some time, and am in urgent need." ("Memoir", p. xxvi). Some years later, Dr. Pierce wrote to Dorothy Livesay explaining his reaction to Knister's letter:

He wrote me that summer in great urgency. I had offered him a position on my staff but he was in great need and his letter sounded so frightfully desperate that when it was forwarded to me at camp I took the next train to Toronto, feeling that no man should suffer like that without all the help I could give him. I arrived only to learn that he had been drowned. He was a magnificent spirit.¹³

This letter and earlier quotations emphasize the attitudes of those people who were close to Raymond Knister. They all

show a sense that he was "in urgent need" and when he finally said so, he was beyond help. Perhaps a heavier docket of evidence can be found in letters from Leo Kennedy to Dorothy Livesay as she was compiling Knister's memoir. Kennedy first states "If anyone was close to Raymond Knister in his last years, I was, and I will swear on a stack of bibles as you elect that the man drowned." A year later, though, Kennedy was less emphatic: "I don't believe that Raymond drowned himself, but after your statements, I don't know." Yet one year later Kennedy admits: "About Raymond . . . Miriam and I, who have compared rather exhaustive notes by now, are of the opinion that we probably didn't know Raymond the man" ¹⁴ What all this suggests is that the evidence marshalled in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir" considering the case for the cause of Knister's death is accurate and irrefutable. People who were close to Knister in various capacities have written their impressions of him and invariably they report a very emotional man whose ideal of art and whose identification with tragic sense of Keats' life pushed him beyond reality.

Enough cannot be said about the many forces acting on a person of Knister's character in the turmoil of the depression. The problem of his death is not so important as the problem of his life. Dorothy Livesay puts it very succinctly:

Whatever the truth of his death may be, it is the life of Raymond Knister which is symbolic for us today. His struggle has been the crux of almost every writer's life in our time. It is a struggle more bitter and desperate in

Canada than almost anywhere else. How it is resolved determines a man's creative output. Some creative figures, like Sir Gilbert Parker, will gradually "go commercial" to sell their stuff and live by the trade; others like Frederick Phillip Grove, will die in poverty and resentment, idealists to the end. That the problem is so often resolved into an uncompromising idealism is due more to our synthetic culture, our schools, our philistinism, than to the individual's weakness. If the creative life were everyone's to share, if it were an accepted part of our community life, there would be no dichotomy. Writers and artists who need the fulfilment of marriage and child-rearing should be given that opportunity, free from the great destroyer, economic fear.

("Memoir", pp. xxxix-xl)

It is ironic that the publication of Raymond Knister's Collected Poems and Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir" should immediately precede the inception of the Canada Council in 1951. If such an organization had been founded in the twenties when Canada was so proud of its development, the tragic circumstances of Knister's death might have been averted. As it was, financial expediency had a great deal to do with his inability to reconcile art and necessity. For Knister there could be no compromise; even death became a part of the artist's lot. He was at the mercy of his environment in that it shaped his attitudes and allowed them to foster. Like Louis MacKay and Leo Kennedy, Raymond Knister ultimately found art irreconcilable with reality. MacKay escaped in skepticism. Kennedy ceased writing. For Knister there was only death. In this sense, he most truly "epitomizes the struggle of a generation".

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the discussion in this thesis that there are many dissimilarities between the three poets and their works. These differences are most evident in style, manner of reaction to common stimuli and the way in which these men developed as poets. It is the purpose of this conclusion, then, to explain why these poets were found particularly appropriate for this study.

Despite their differences, L. A. MacKay, Leo Kennedy and Raymond Knister are bound together through art. For each of these men art is a release from the pain of reality. Whether it be the harsh braying of MacKay, the rapturous verses of Kennedy or the plaintive murmurings of Knister, poetry transcends the mere exigencies of the everyday world. In art there is a freedom not to be discovered through expository prose. Poets must write, they must express their sensibilities or submit to the stifling atmosphere of cold practicality. For different reasons, each of the three poets studied in this thesis ceased writing. They found that their art and their lives as artists were out of tune or incompatible with reality and thus their art had no basis or rationale of existence.

Throughout this thesis emphasis has been placed on

the parallels of the artists' lives and works. This genetic or sociological approach recognizes that art is not created in a vacuum. It is not the "extrinsic" approach that René Wellek and Austin Warren describe in Theory of Literature.¹ In this thesis the approach more fits this description by Wilbur Scott:

Sociological criticism starts with a conviction that art's relations to society are vitally important, and that the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen one's aesthetic response to a work of art. Art is not created in a vacuum; it is work not simply of a person, but of an author fixed in time and space, answering to a community of which he is an important, because articulate part. The sociological critic, therefore, is interested in understanding the social milieu and the extent to which and manner in which the artist responds to it.²

To a large extent this thesis does not document specific sociological situations and thus does not absolutely conform to Scott's description. The attempt has been made though, to express the feeling of the twenties and thirties especially in connection to the response to art and the artist. By making these connections it is hoped that the art of these three poets is placed in a framework that indicates some of the forces affecting it. There is no one force that made these men victims of society. Certainly their environment was a large factor, but basically the fault or lack was in the temperament of the individual.

It seems, by virtue of their continuing interest in art, that such poets as F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith were able to adapt to the change in society and its attitudes following the 1929 depression. Leo Kennedy managed to re-

pudiate a great deal of the romantic principles shown in his pre-1933 poetry, but it seems that he could not wholly accept the harsh demand for reality in the thirties. The poem "Calling Eagles" shows his concern with the new attitudes. However there is little indication in his later work that Kennedy had the temperament to reject his romanticism totally and accept the new vision of reality. It is this fluctuating environment and the seeming inability to come to terms with it that is common to all three poets. Raymond Knister was allowed to exist in the twenties. He had a vision of art and artist that approached being ideal. In the twenties his ideal was not so completely impractical as it was in the thirties. The change was in Knister's psyche as well as his environment in that the resultant inability to meet a shifting focus led to self-sacrifice rather than compromise. L. A. MacKay followed much the same course as Kennedy and Knister. His satire is a criticism of his environment but it is far different than the nihilist attitudes of Jonathan Swift. It does not seem that satirical attitudes were a way of life for MacKay. His vision is penetrating but there is not an uncompromising toughness to it that is unassailable. MacKay's rejection of art and subsequent move from Canada would indicate that he too was unable to identify himself with the possibilities of a new society.

In conclusion, by studying the art, lives and environment of these three poets, this thesis explains their unique situation and their importance in the progression of

Canadian literature. The genetic or sociological critical approach is the most viable method of examination of Canadian poetry at this period because it allows for a probing of origin and causation. Thus the rather light body of work of MacKay, Kennedy and Knister is illuminated by "the color of the times".

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

- ¹Watson, "The Conflict of Idealism and Realism", 14-43.
- ²Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, 135.
- ³John Garvin, "A Review of Muraka by Muriel Bruce", Canadian Bookman, XII (Sept. 1930), 186.
- ⁴"Editorial", Canadian Mercury, I (Dec. 1928), 3.
- ⁵Kennedy, "The Future of Canadian Literature", 99.
- ⁶Gordon, "Canadian Poetry", 178-180.
- ⁷MacKay, "On Not Understanding the Poets", 344-351.
- ⁸Kennedy, "The Future of Canadian Literature", 99-100.
- ⁹Margaret Ray, "Raymond Knister: A Bibliography of His Works", The Collected Poems of Raymond Knister, ed. Dorothy Livesay, 39-45. This list is not complete but it is an excellent guide to Knister's achievements.
- ¹⁰Knister, My Star Predominant, 174.

Chapter I

- ¹Appendix A.
- ²Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, 89.
- ³Canadian Forum, XII, 342.
- ⁴The poems in The Ill-Tempered Lover are much more varied in subject and specific in reference than those few poems in Viper's Bugloss. Unfortunately it is difficult to trace the chronology of the poems.
- ⁵Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 1.
- ⁶Eliot, Selected Poems, 52.
- ⁷Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 7.
- ⁸Queen's Quarterly, 54, 346.

⁹Ibid., 347.

¹⁰Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 5.

¹¹In such poems as "Fidelia Vulnera Amici", MacKay's alternative is more than implied. In the seventh stanza he suggests that the growth of Canada focuses on body and neglects mind. MacKay advocates caution so both develop evenly.

¹²Brown, On Canadian Poetry, 78.

¹³Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 5.

¹⁴See Scott's "Canadian Authors' Meet" (1927).

¹⁵Kennedy, "New Direction for Canadian Poets", New Frontier, I (June 1936), 21.

¹⁶MacKay, The Ill-Tempered Lover, 5.

¹⁷Written in 1929. Reproduced in Appendix A.

¹⁸MacKay, "Nunc Scio, Quid Sit Amor" (1930), Viper's Bugloss, 1.

¹⁹Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 2.

²⁰MacKay's only play, The Freedom of Jean Guichet, deals more fully with the illusion of love. Michael Tait thinks that the play "displays a certain originality but is defeated by its incongruous mixture of farce and melodrama" (Literary History of Canada, p. 637). For the most part I agree with this comment although I think Tait mistakes satire for farce. The structure of the play is melodramatic because the situations are not credible. This is especially true of the final scene. The play is in the tradition of Oscar Wilde's Lady Windermere's Fan where there is a farcical love situation that approaches tragedy. In MacKay's play there is an undertone of desperation that builds to sudden, violent murder. Love is a canker in the heart of man in The Freedom of Jean Guichet. Throughout the play, cryptic comments on love and life support the philosophy outlined in the poems "Outmoded Wisdom" and "Pagan Death".

²¹Smalacombe [MacKay], Viper's Bugloss, 3.

²²Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 224.

²³MacKay, The Ill-Tempered Lover, 5.

²⁴Appendix A.

²⁵Appendix A.

- ²⁶MacKay, "And Spoil the Child", The Ill-Tempered Lover, 37.
- ²⁷Ibid., 24.
- ²⁸MacKay, "Bliss Carman: A Dialogue", Masks of Poetry, 57.
- ²⁹MacKay, "The Raven Himself Is Hoarse", Appendix A.
- ³⁰MacKay, "And Spoil the Child", Appendix A.
- ³¹Frye, "The Nature of Satire", 79.
- ³²Mack, "The Muse of Satire", 85.
- ³³MacKay, "Outmoded Wisdom", The Ill-Tempered Lover, 32.

Chapter II

- ¹Canadian Mercury, I (Dec. 1928), 3.
- ²Pratt, "New Notes in Canadian Poetry", Canadian Comment, (Feb. 1934), 26.
- ³Ibid., 27.
- ⁴Kennedy, "Words for a Resurrection", The Shrouding, 5. (This poem first appeared in The McGilliad, April, 1931, under the title "Easter Morning".) Unless otherwise stated, references to Kennedy's poems will be from The Shrouding and followed by a descriptive notation in the text.
- ⁵Collin, The White Savannahs, 271.
- ⁶Gregory Peter Schultz in his M.A. thesis on The Periodical Poetry of A. J. M. Smith, F. R. Scott, Leo Kennedy, A. M. Klein and Dorothy Livesay (University of Western Ontario, 1957) stresses the function of myth and its derivation from Frazer's accounts. It is a valuable study in that Schultz finds a 'tradition'. He, along with W. E. Collin, focuses too much on myth and not enough on why Kennedy denied his Catholic heritage. The problem lies in the factors contributing to the disturbance and how, if they were, reconciled.
- ⁷Collin, The White Savannahs, 179-180.
- ⁸Smith, "Shadows There Are", New Provinces, ed. Leo Kennedy et al, 65.
- ⁹Brown, On Canadian Poetry, 68.

¹⁰ Kennedy, "Direction for Canadian Poets", New Frontier, I (June 1936), 23.

¹¹ Smith, New Provinces, ed. Leo Kennedy et al, 69.

¹² Smith, Canadian Mercury, I (April 1929), 102.

¹³ Smith, Canadian Mercury, I (Feb. 1929), 61-62.

¹⁴ Scott, New Provinces, ed. Leo Kennedy et al, 52 and 54.

¹⁵ Stephen, "Canadian Poets and Critics", New Frontier, 3 (Sept. 1963), 21. In this article Mr. Stephen points out that Dorothy Livesay had greater possibilities than Smith, Scott, Klein or Kennedy. Her work, he says, "has its roots in the life process" and is attuned to the modern struggle. He cites Miss Livesay's poem "Day and Night" as an example. I find Mr. Stephen's argument unsatisfactory. Leo Kennedy's work with myth and nature, for example, is an extremely appropriate treatment of the modern struggle. Perhaps Kennedy is suggesting, as did Raymond Knister, that we must keep the natural world as a point of reference if the horror of Miss Livesay's "Day and Night" is to be averted.

¹⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷ Smith, "Contemporary Poetry", The McGill Fortnightly Review, II (Dec. 15, 1926), 31.

¹⁸ Kennedy, "Direction for Canadian Poets", New Frontier, I (June 1936), 21.

¹⁹ Kennedy, "Gravedigger's Rhapsody", The Shrouding, 19-20. Also reproduced in Appendix B.

²⁰ The delight that Kennedy takes in poking fun at the Church establishment is seen in "Hyacinths for Hadrian". In this poem, Kennedy describes the Pope leaving his office to grow "hyacinths instead". This poem can be found in Appendix B.

²¹ Rank, Beyond Psychology, 11-16.

²² Ibid., 16.

²³ Watt, Literary History of Canada, 471.

²⁴ Kennedy, The Shrouding, 45.

²⁵ This poem was first published in New Frontier, II, 1937, 104.

²⁶ This poem originally appeared in the 1931 edition of The McGilliad, II, 80-81, under the title of "Woman in Home-spun".

²⁷Rashley, Poetry in Canada, 145.

²⁸Ibid., 149.

²⁹Kennedy, "Canadian Writers of the Past -- Archibald Lampman", Canadian Forum, XIII (May 1933), 303.

³⁰Collin, The White Savannahs, 276.

Chapter III

¹Kennedy, The Shrouding.

²Livesay, "Memoir" in The Collected Poems of Raymond Knister, xxxvii. For other quotations from the "Memoir" appearing in the text, a notation will follow giving the pages on which they occur in this edition.

³Knister in a letter dated April 11, 1924. This letter is reproduced in Dorothy Livesay's "Memoir", xxiii.

⁴Peter Stevens also makes this point in "The Old Futility of Art".

⁵"The Old Futility of Art", 47.

⁶Knister, "The Poetical Works of Archibald Lampman", 348-361.

⁷Knister, "The Poetical Works of Wilfred Campbell", 435-449.

⁸Knister, Op. Cit., 351.

⁹This quotation is from an unpublished letter dated December 7, 1945, from William Colgate to Dorothy Livesay.

¹⁰Knister wrote this in a letter to Mrs. Livesay on September 15, 1929. The letter is unpublished.

¹¹Kennedy, "Raymond Knister", 461. Knister had read this article before his death and approved it.

¹²This shift in form is an important change. As Knister's sense of the importance of art grew, he naturally felt that he would reach more readers through prose. Art was not for art's sake, according to Knister, it was a very important medium through which the artist should broaden his reader's experience. Its function was not to moralize, but to enlighten. This aspect became so important to Knister that he felt compelled to do his part. He must write at all costs.

¹³Unpublished letter from Dr. Lorne Pierce to Dorothy Livesay dated April 4, 1944.

¹⁴These quotations are from a series of unpublished letters from Leo Kennedy to Dorothy Livesay.

Conclusion

¹Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, 61-113.

²Scott, ed., Five Approaches of Literary Criticism, 123.

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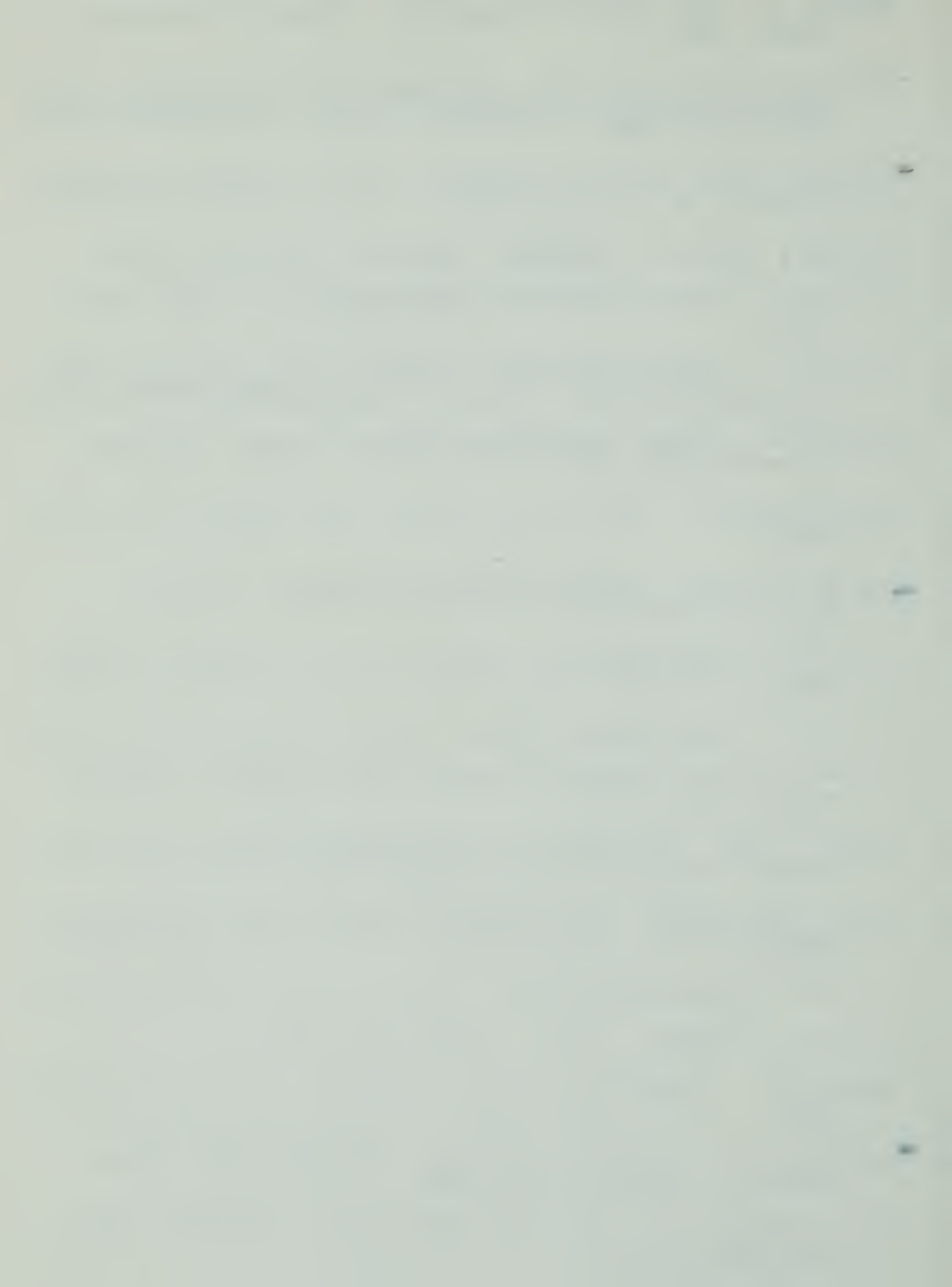
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APPENDIX A

REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS

Pity the innocent. There are none innocent, none.
Not all the quiet kindly men of good will.
We were weak who should have been strong, we were
 disunited,
We were smug, and lazy, and gullible, and short-sighted.
Whatever we did, there was more we should have done
Before there was nothing left to do but kill.

Now we squeal and squirm and shift and shuffle blame
On the paltry paladins that hold command
Because we let them. But God is not mocked.
Hell-gates are open; we could have kept them locked.
If it be shame to slay, on us the shame,
And if we die, we die by our own hand.

L. A. MacKay

NATURAL RESOURCES

Come and see the vast natural wealth of this mine.
In the short space of ten years
It has produced six American millionaires
And two thousand pauperized Canadian families.

F. R. Scott

Canadian Forum, XII (May 1932), #140, p. 299.

* NATURAL RESOURCES is one of "An Anthology of Up-To-Date-Canadian Poetry" that appeared in the May 1932 edition of Canadian Forum. Most of the poems are epigrammatic, lacking the substance of good social criticism.

EPITAPH FOR A FINANCIER

There are poor worms most willing to take shares
In every one of this great man's affairs,
So shed no tear at this forc'd liquidation;
It but preceeds a new incorporation.

F. R. Scott

Canadian Forum, XI (Nov. 1930), #122, p. 55.

MARCH FIELD

Now the old folded snow
Shrinks from black earth.
Now is thrust forth
Heavy and still
The field's dark furrow.

Not yet the flowing
The mound-stirring
Not yet the inevitable flow.
There is a warm wind, stealing
From blunt brown hills, loosening
Sod and cold loam
Round rigid root and stem.

But no seed stirs
In this bare prison
Under the hollow sky.
The stone is not yet rolled away
Nor the body risen.

F. R. Scott

IN THE WILDERNESS

He walks alone, uncomforted,
In Spring's green ripple, Autumn's red.

Birds, like dark starlight,
Twinkle in the sky, are light

As feathers blown about in a gale,
And their song is as cold and sharp as hail.

The lonely air and the hard ground
Are crying to him with no sound

Words that the hurdy-gurdy year
Whines ceaselessly in his sad ear.

He walks between the green leaf and the red
Like one who follows a beloved dead,

And with a young, pedantic eye
Observes how still the dead do lie.

His gaze is stopped in the hard earth
And cannot penetrate to heaven's mirth.

A. J. M. Smith

AND SPOIL THE CHILD

(1931)

O CANADA, our home, our native land!

Beset with breathy bards on every hand
 We see thee rise, the true North, free and strong.
 But where the strength, or freedom, in thy song?
 Ah, Pope, thou shouldst be living at this time;
 Learned and lewd alike we scribble rhyme.
 And shall I listen only? Shall I not
 Give back as ponderous verse as e'er I got?
 I too have learn'd, as every school-child learns,
 To censor Shakespeare, and admonish Burns;
 Have mark'd where Milton's fire, and Dryden's, paled,
 Where Chaucer falter'd, and where Shelley failed.
 Train'd thus in blasting giants, shall I then
 Restrain my thunderbolts from fellow-men?
 When six of every seven that one sees
 Are drooling verse with self-applausive ease,
 Such stuff as dribbles down the nerveless gum
 Swimming the uppermost saliva-scum?
 Not mine, alas, Parnassus' peak to scale;
 But seeing Poesy's poor patient tail
 Bedevill'd with so many a tweak and twist
 'Tis difficult to be no satirist.

See first where gentle Gallus gushes forth
 Hymning the happy springtime of the North,
 The sparkling drifts, or else the flaming trees,
 In twenty thousand lines as like as peas.
 How languidly the liquid lyrics loll
 And dangle off into a dying fall,
 As smooth as celluloid, or pulp-wood silk,
 As toothsome and sustaining as skim milk,
 While Swinburne, tumbling with unquiet breast,
 Mutters, "I'm dead; for God's sake let me rest!"

Next, with a roll of never-muffled drums
 The rattling chariot of Furius comes.
 A Modern he, who brays a strident song
 Like hoardings, vivid, and like garlic, strong;
 Makes up in sputtering what he lacks in sense,
 And to the nostril's, adds the ear's offence.
 A gap-mouth'd mob, a vacant, shambling show
 The bawling lines in crutch'd procession go.
 "Hold, friend," we cry, "this image seems untrue;
 This, meaningless." "What matter, Sirs? 'Tis new."
 "When you have said all this, what is't you've said?"
 "Faugh! You're a foggy, Sir, a dunderhead!"
 These rules of art, these only, I confess:

'What's said is nothing; how 'tis said, is less.'
 You seek for thought, or music; here you'll find
 The green immediate scurf skimm'd from the mind,
 Pure raw material of sense-impression
 Dripping and drabbling in its own progression.
 I scorn your standards, Sir, I scorn your rules!"
 The sweetest praise is the disdain of fools.

See next Lycoris brings a damp bouquet
 Of pale emotions, bunch'd in neat array,
 And misty meditations, maundering thin
 "Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in."
 A mild dejection mates with milder rage,
 And passion simpers on each pallid page;
 While stern reflection hews from out the breast
 What oft was thought, but ne'er so ill exprest.

But tremble, critic! See Robustus stand
 A swinging ballad clutch'd in either hand.
 This sturdy weapon of an elder time
 Will rip Detraction's ribs with rugged rhyme.
 Yet tremble not: the jingling chain of sound
 Most of its length, still drags along the ground.
 The story sprawls and scrambles; when 'tis done
 Fifty flat words usurp the place of one.

Humour! Dread Goddess! Most unpitying Muse!
 Thee Bufo braves, and in no angel's shoes.
 Seriously, well-meaningly designs
 Uneasy arabesques of vapid lines,
 Mocking the bellowings of thy boisterous cheeks,
 Poor prattler, with such vague, pathetic squeaks --
 Be gentle, Humour; merely at him laugh
 And puff him from thee like a wisp of chaff,
 Till in an inky ocean he shall drop
 So small, so far, we shall not hear the plop.

In panegyric next Pomposus struts.
Fair Canada's his theme, from soup to nuts.
 No alley-cat so well his back-yard knows
 As we the Northern Lights, th' eternal snows,
 The sombre forests, and the mountains grand,
 The flashing streams, the golden farming-land;
 And still unask'd, unwearied bards rehearse
 Unglorified topography in verse.
 The open road, the tourist's out-of-doors
 Bewitch battalions of ebullient bores,
 While Inspiration huddles in his shell,
 And Truth still sulks, deep in her icy well.
 O Canada, most patient of abstractions!
 These pallid piles of verbal petrifications

Hide you from e'en your lovers' keenest sense.
 Bring all your blizzards, quick, and blow them hence!

"But, but . . ." you say, "But, but . . ." But me no buts.
 The one thing that our poets need is -- guts.
 One-half their work is bilge; the rest is rot:
 The limp expression of a flabby thought.
 And yet one trick might teach some few t' excel:
 Write half as much, and write it twice as well.
 Write what you must; and if another's said it,
 Withdraw: you might as well; he'll get the credit.
 More sternly think, then write, and if in doubt,
 Rewrite, rewrite again, then chuck it out.

Are there none righteous then? Yes, X and Y
 And sometimes Z, still wear their laurels high.
 For these are flesh and blood, not skin and straw.
 Is there one inch of all their skin flick'd raw
 By the rude lash of this long-suffering tongue?
 The gall'd jades wince; their withers are unwrung.
 If others could, why don't they do the same?
 The Critic, Sir, the Critic is to blame
 Who with insulting clemency misuses
 One rule for home, and one for foreign, muses.
 Who'd face the labour of not being dull
 When dullness is accounted wonderful?
 Or who can value e'en deserved praise
 When Harry, Dick, and Tom wear equal bays?
 Yet most the bards the tender lesson teach,
 And puff the swelling brain-pan, each for each.
 We arch the back, and stroke and purr by turns,
 While "Hail, young Byron!" straight your "Words-
worth!" earns.

. . . . Perchance some day a traveller will pass
 Where, stumbling idly through the seedy grass
 A little dingy fallen stone he'll see,
 And read, "Here lies Canadian Poetry:
 Died, in a Hospital for Paralytics,
 Smother'd in kindness by complacent critics."

L. A. MacKay

FIDELIA VULNERA AMICI

(1931)

If TO a human head a horse's neck
 Your painter set, proceeding thence to deck
 With various plumes a motley lot of limbs
 Cribbed from whatever walks, or crawls, or swims,
 Till in a filthy fish the mixture ends,
 Could you refrain a gross guffaw, my friends?
 What of a Beaver then, with budding mane
 That still he coaxes and pomades in vain,
 While fluffy feathers, the uncivil things,
 Insist to clothe his flapping paws in wings;
 Who ponders on his own ambiguous tail,
 "Is that a tuft, a feather, or a scale?"
 And like some baffling beast that dies in dreams,
 Roars like a Lion, like an Eagle screams?
 Thrice happy beast, if ever he could find
 A way to know, or guess at, his own mind.

Well, let us help him. 'Tis a pious task
 For Beaver-corpuscles. First then, we'll ask
 What's our ambition? Why, we aim to be
 The Empire's, nay, the whole world's granary.
 A lofty mark, i' faith; to find our place
 Just in the belly of the human race.
 Nor even there securely. Ah, the blest
 Simplicity of our agrarian West!
 What though poor silly Nature failed to grant
 Complete monopoly in the precious plant?
 We borrow Nelson's telescope, and still
 Maintain with dogged syllogisitic skill,
 "Wealth springs from labour; man's a kind of meat;
 All flesh is grass: therefore, all wealth is wheat."
 And if it were, what help were that to us
 Who frame our foreign commerce, roughly thus:
 The right hand asks a price that none will pay,
 The left hand pushes proffered trade away.

What then? Our glory goes no farther deep
 Than roots of grass? Why, not at all; we keep
 A second barrel still to shoot at fate.
 Is not that happy land supremely great
 Which with the wealth of fertile fields combines
 The inexhaustible riches of her mines
 -- Which yet, perhaps, may last her buccaneers
 With luck, a matter of some thirty years?
 There lies the wealth. Root it out all at once.
 So we be fat, the devil take our sons!
 Had we so little time, so little faith,
 To think the land must die with our own death?

Must we leave nothing? Did we reckon then
 Ourselves to be the very last of men?
 Slow grows the oak; the lank and sappy weed
 Shoots limply up with true Canadian speed.
 We have no time, we have no time to grow
 Well-knit, broad-shouldered, vigorous, and slow.
 We must have immigrants, that we may sprout
 Into a lubberly long anaemic lout,
 Nor ask, what did the Dinosaur gain
 Whose body grew so far beyond his brain?

Say, what remains when mines and forests go
 The way of beaver, and the buffalo?
 Though we renew the woods, restock the lakes,
 Where shall we find the magic art that makes
 An emptied earth put forth her wealth again?
 Our rude forefathers, unenlightened men,
 Honoured him most who most with armed hand
 Ruined and spoiled their hapless neighbours' land;
 But we, most infinitely wiser grown,
 Adore him most who most despoils our own.
 And lest too slow ourselves our wealth should waste,
 Still bawl and bray, in desperate haggard haste,
 Calling the carrion crows of all the earth
 To gut the unhappy land that gave us birth.
 We could have kept our hands from this foul stain,
 Have cleared the forest, duly tilled the plain,
 And worked the mine, to fill our daily need,
 In reverence, in worship, not in greed;
 Who now, to bring our swollen pride to birth,
 Lay impious hands upon our mother Earth,
 And, blind with selfish lust, from shore to shore
 Ravish her crudely, like a hired whore.

And what's our gain? (a) The familiar curse
 Of unemployment; (b) -- and rather worse --
 Employment, in conditions that reflect
 Small enough credit on our self-respect.
 Smug squint-eyed slavery, that lays a stain
 Less on our heart, perhaps, than on our brain,
 Our brain, that shuts its eyes to evidence,
 Defies all life, all history, all sense,
 And worships as divine, eternal truth
 An economic system, rude, uncouth,
 Wasteful, unjust, unhealthy, that can boast
 A few poor hundred years of life at most,
 When men, except an odd old-fashioned few
 Forgot the simple truth that once they knew,
 Honoured the giver less than him that lends,
 And set the means of life above the ends.

What can we do about it? We may shift

At least, our form of servitude, may lift
 Our masters' boot heels from our country's neck
 -- And place our own there -- at the least, may check
 This reckless fever of the childish few
 That strip our wealth, and know not what they do.
 Where lies the gain, if Parliaments control
 Production, Distribution, -- and the Dole?
 In this, most likely: that their hands are free
 For general action; when they disagree
 (As, if the gods be good, they mostly will)
 For general inaction, better still.
 No greater blessing, but a less offence.
 Folly inactive, oft resembles sense.

"So then," says one, "your timorous counsel ends
 In sordid poverty?" Not at all, my friends.
 I know the truth the Grecians understood:
 "How hardly shall a poor man's life be good."
 I never claimed that famine fostered health,
 And still the best manure of Art is Wealth.
 I but suggest the interests of the land
 Might prosper more, more generally planned,
 That we might put our corporate brains to use
 Settling how much, and what, we shall produce,
 Not bolt, like Lazarus in the holy fable,
 The random crumbs from Dives' vulgar table.
 I but suggest Ambition shift his goal
 Sometimes, from body's growth to growth of soul,
 Who now, poor thing, is squashed most sadly flat
 Under a jellyish mound of muscled fat.
 We have yet a chance to stand in the world's eyes
 For something more than silly wealth or size;
 But these we stress so much, men have forgot,
 Almost, whether we have a soul or not,
 Seeing us to some Moloch-god of Matter
 Offer our own fat head on a shallow platter.

But stay, abandoned critic! Dost not know
 How fair a spiritual light we throw?
 See where three thousand thousand paces shine
 Of open, unbesoldiered border-line!
 Noble, begad! I never heard the ant
 Kept up a guard against the elephant.
 The generous Lamb wipes a fraternal tear
 And comforts Neighbour Lion not to fear.
 Inspiring sight! And inexpensive, too;
 But let the credit go where credit's due.
 We have our faults, but one we ne'er display --
 Too tender justice to the U. S. A.
 Poor 'wilderer cousins! whom we love, fear, hate,
 And envy, and insult, and imitate.

And yet, towards England, our affection mocks
The wit with more ingenious paradox.
Fondly we cherish her, in filial pride,
So long as all the profit's on our side.
We seek her marts -- but Lord, the unholy fuss
If ever she presumes to trade with us! --
And generously make good our loyal vaunts
Offering her everything but what she wants.
Yet one commodity with no thought of price
We lavish -- tons on tons of good advice;
And Grandma, tugging slyly at our legs,
Demurely learns the art of sucking eggs.
. . . At that, she might pick up, by paying heed,
Some rather useful dodges; and indeed
I'd rather be, begging the Prairies' pardon,
The world's schoolmaster than its kitchen-garden.

L. A. MacKay

ENVOI

Ask not me how much is true
In all this -- as if I knew!
Other men before my time
Have wonderfully lied in rhyme
Nor likely knew, no more than I,
Which was truth, and which was lie.
Damn the meaning! Take the sound!
It's words that make the world go round.

L. A. MacKay

OUTMODED WISDOM

or

The Diversions of the Seven Sages

I. PITTACUS

ENDURE, my soul, endure and be thou dumb,
 Knowing, though this be ill, yet worse will come.

II. SOLON

Set me his statue up in alabaster
 Who ends one single day with no disaster.

III. THALES

Men mock the foolish wisdom of the wise.
 Moles think men over-rate the worth of eyes.

IV. BIAS

Two wrongs won't make a right; the odds are long
 That two rights, though, will make at least one wrong.

V. PERIANDER

Tell not your voters, "Thus you gain your ends,"
 My statesman; tell them, "Thus you spite your friends."

VI. CLEOBULUS

To bring mine enemy down in black despair
 I prayed, "May the gods grant his every prayer!"

VII. ANACHARSIS

Why, they're all cynics! What's a cynic, then?
 -- A man that can enjoy his fellow-men.

L. A. MacKay

SUNDAY

Sunlight
Pouring like white wine from a blue bowl
Quivering on the housetops
Gliding the hard roadways
Making drunk all birds and beasts
And a few wise men.

And crowds walking solemnly
Into false -- Gothic doorways
Into religious dimness.

F. R. Scott

Canadian Forum, X (Aug. 1930), #19, p. 394.

SEA CLIFF

Wave on wave
and green on rock,
and white between
the splash and black
the crash and hiss
of the feathery fall,
the snap and shock
of the water wall
and the wall of rock:

After --
after the ebb-flow
wet rock,
high --
high over the slapping green,
water sliding away
and the rock abiding,
new rock riding
out of the spray.

A. J. M. Smith

Canadian Forum, X (June 1930), #117, p. 332.

FRANKIE WENT DOWN TO THE CORNER

(1936)

ONTARIO'S such a respectable place;
 Drinking's no crime, but it's still a disgrace,
 So hide us away behind curtain and screen
 While we stealthily go through the motions obscene
 In a manner genteel, correctly genteel,
 Secret and stuffy, but always genteel.

Let us drink upon land, as we smoke in a train,
 In places as airy and light as a drain,
 Let us scuttle for cover, like bugs under shelves,
 Lest people should think we're enjoying ourselves.
 Oh no, we're genteel, we're grimly genteel
 (To be seen drinking gaily is far from genteel).

Though our neighbours all say, with a sneer and a snicker,
 We're not man enough to stand up to our liquor,
 Three cheers for the tables! A man on his feet
 Can carry much less than slumped in a seat.
 Besides, it's genteel, it's very genteel;
 Beer served at a table's completely genteel.

But of course if a restaurant ask us to dine
 It's immoral to order a bottle of wine
 --But wait! Are there six standard beds in the house?
 Then away with dull care! We're all set for a souse.
 For then it's genteel (beds make it genteel),
 Though drunk and dyspeptic, we must be genteel.

And we can't allow music, or people might think
 Our pleasure's not limited solely to drink.
 So musicians may starve, but they must not appear
 In the sinister presence of bottles of beer.
 For that isn't genteel, it's far from genteel;
 Only a gurgle is really genteel.

"Bar" is a nasty, a horrible word.
 "Taprooms" and "taverns" and "pubs" are absurd;
 Give us a name with a resonant boom,
 A respectable name like "Beverage Room".
 Shabby genteel, shabby genteel,
 Ontario's bound to be shabby genteel.

APPENDIX B

EPITHALAMIUM BEFORE FROST

for J. and E. K.

Now that leaves shudder from the hazel limb,
And poppies pod, and maples whirl their seed,
And squirrels dart from private stores to slim
The oak of acorns with excessive greed;
And now that sap withdraws, and black geese skim
In rigid phalanx over sedge and reed,
And rime surmised at morning pricks the rim
Of tawny stubble, husk and perishing weed --
Now shall I cry Epithalamium!
Over the bed which your two forms have pressed;
And bid Earth's fertile spirits stir and come
To winter at your hearth, and make it blessed;
Until returns the bridal trillium,
And the first crocus hoists its yellow crest!

Leo Kennedy

THE CAPTIVE

This bird that beats clipped wings and grieves
Within the prison of my breast,
Bewildered that its timid rage
Should prove indifferent protest,
May yet acquire such fluid voice
That all who hear will pause and stare,
And think it strange that vocal skill
Should flourish so in prison air.

Leo Kennedy

CALLING EAGLES

(1936)

Slanting the ragged peaks of the mind, Eagles,
 Swift thinkers, readers in books and the bones of nature,
 construing
 Life at its conflux, observing nebula, sifting fact from
 suppose, swooping
 With noble talons arched for the scrap of truth;

Hurl from the frozen roof of the world, splitting
 Air with breast feather, diving
 Outward and downward, scattering
 Hawks with the fear of your purpose noble plunge;

Come down into life, Eagles, where iron grinds bone,
 hands falter
 And brave men perish for a tyrant's peace;
 Come where Spain strangles in blood, Ethiopia
 Groans at the ironcased heel, Vienna
 Numbers the dead, remembers Weissel and Wallisch;
 Scream for Brazilian dungeons where Prestes rots
 And fascist madmen rattle gaoler's keys;

Drop from your eyrie, spurning the misted heights,
 Plunge to the valley where life is and verdure,
 Join with the groundlings, multitudes, with hope and
 passion
 Lifting their fists with the steel clenched, towering
 A new state from the crumble and wrack of the old;

You are part of this turmoil, Eagles, knit to its glory.
 There is work for your strong beaks and the thundering
 wings,
 For the clean flight of the mind and the sharp perception:
There is only a glacial death on the lonely crags.

Leo Kennedy

OCTOBER FROST

When the burnished leaf drifts
To the meagre stubble,
And the sheltered beast lifts
Bovine head, and a huddle
Of crows caw into a wind
Of late October, and a brittle
Frost shows silver where the blind
Claw of the mole pressed spittle
Of earthworms on dull soil;
When the last mass
Of goldenrod is gone, and toil
Of the year ended, and I pass
Among bleached bones of summer, hearing geese
Clack in flight overhead
With trailing feet, and beaks
Set to the south

I shall think of the dead:
Of gaunt unresurrected sons of God,
Crocus bulbs parched and patient under sod.

Leo Kennedy

GRAVEDIGGER'S RHAPSODY

(1930)

PROLOGUE INSCRIBED TO MOURNERS

LID the flat staring eye, as pale as ice;
 Bind up the fallen jaw; then fold the palms
 Decorously upon the breast; and thrice
 Intone the mass for purgatorial alms;
 Draw the blind level with the sill; entice
 The window from her dolour with bland psalms
 Designed to praise the dead; by some device
 Familiar to your habit, soothe her qualms.
 Then summon acolyte and solemn priest
 To sprinkle Holy Water with a rod;
 Bid sexton delve a niche for the deceased,
 And bear him to repose beneath turned sod,
 Where worms preside, impatient for the feast
 Which celebrates a soul returned to God.

SHALE BURIAL

Gather the fringes of earth, then draw together
 The parts of this brown wound, and bind them fast
 With measured stitches of your spade, Gravedigger.
 Disturb this rubble; let shale fragments cover
 The cloistered ease of those interred hereunder;
 Hasten your toil . . . the daylight will not last . . .

COMMENT ON THE DEAD

Nor may the freshness of these roses last
 After the first sharp downpour; leaf and fern
 Will blister in the sun and briefly turn
 To dry brown powder as the days go past;
 And nesting grackels and gaunt crows will spoil
 The symmetry of wreaths . . . strong beaks will tear
 Emblems of sorrow and respect . . . and share
 The flimsy ribbon and the bright tinfoil.

MORTALITY STRESSED

All things come alike, they said,
 To one sequel, all go down --
 Leper, sultan, mage and clown.
 John and doubting Herod pass;
 Peter, Paul and Caiaphas.
 Only Christ within the rock
 Waits the sundering and the shock
 Of the stone rolled back.

In pain

Lazarus must die again.
Life is tenuous, they said,
All go down.

Each casual Hamlet sinks beneath the treason
Of his esteemed flesh, and in due season
Refers it as a thing of no great matter
To rapturous earthworms eager to be fatter.

Yorick grins underground with ample reason.

DISCOURSE METAPHYSICAL

Metaphysicians place the soul upon a platter.

Small owls and flitter mice conspire to utter
The body's last abasement; these assert
With careful malice that the dying shudder
The body from the soul, and then revert
By way of worms and rot to their prenatal
Dissolubility, and resurrect
Within the stems of crow-weed or of sorrel,
As the matrices of the soil elect.

At which stout men of God, in contradiction
Of such frail heresy, rise from their knees
To shrill a theological conviction --
Most hideously clad in black are these!

Small flitter mice, and owls, and men of peace,
Screaming their metaphysics without cease.

REVERSION TO CANTICLES

Close the door and let me hide
Deep in the Bosom of the Lord! The Bride
Waits in the darkness; let me go
To a better land I know.
By the river I shall stand;
Hold my Saviour by the Hand;
Joshua, cry with your final breath:
Rise up, Jesus! Go down, Death!

INVOCATION OF THE LIVING

How shall I cry a welcome to the worm my sister?

I have loved pain and pleasure overwell:
 Eyes misted with passion, the lids heavily aswoon,
 The small nails bruising the palms in ecstasy . . .
 The long shuddering breath, and the ensuing quiet.
 How shall I cleave me from my works, indeed?

Sexton, your bell cries bitter valediction!

I move unwillingly into the still
 Vaulted repository of my dust;
 The quiet of this shuttered room will still
 All memory of living, as it must;
 That the tall palace of my flesh shall be
 Rebuilt for a stranger, well I know,
 And yet demur the ended tenancy;
 It is unwillingly enough I go.
 Assuage the little fluttering pulse with cool
 Oblivion; press silence on your lips;
 Each fleeting moment bares the soul to whips
 That, barbed with sorrow, stain the purple wool
 With other pigment; let your charity
 Caution no grief, rebuke no sudden outcry.

FINAL INSTRUCTION

Now, quietly, let sand slip over
 The varnished wood; let rubble slide and shift
 Under your heel, Gravedigger.
 Withdraw your cords, and lift
 Soberly your mattock.

Remove your barrow.

Leo Kennedy

ANGUISH OUTWORN

The breath of funeral flowers pervades
the shuttered orbit of the tomb
where Lazarus prefigured, lies
within an anteroom.

With alien gravity the mourners walk
 Into the darkened room; their whispered talk
 Is of the virtue of the newly-dead
 Who lies with fern and roses at his head
 Standing along the wall in diffident
 Uncertainty, they see the widow bent
 Among the plaintive sharers of her grief . . .
 Their reverence is mixed with unbelief.

Their feet have shuffled hesitantly through
 The widow's soul; the rustle of her new
 Stiff sable taffeta is like the lisp
 Of sand on glass; her dried hand grasps a wisp
 Of black-edged, crumpled cotton, with which she
 Affirms the fiat of mortality.

Sombrely testifying her regret
 These are the symbols of a life-long debt
 To him . . . the oaken coffin and the pall . . .
 The rented purple hangings in the hall
 Over the torn wallpaper . . . and the frail
 Blossoms of candles sepulchrally pale.

Death has come swiftly as the autumn dusk,
 Withdrawn the living seed, and left a husk
 Of bone and sinew to be set aside,
 That had been both her sorrow and her pride;
 Death has come softly as a lid drawn down
 Over an eye from which the lustre fades;
 Death has come darkly . . . but her mind evades
 The constant thought . . . her brows contract and frown
 Over unseeing eyes that cloud with shadow.
 The focus of her being grows small and narrow.

Too soon her conscious mind resumes its theme
 With blunt reiterations; half thoughts teem
 And crowd like drum taps on a vibrant drum
 Rolling death's tattoo . . . striking sorrow dumb.

This is the pomp and circumstance of matter,
 That at a given hour, the bloom must shatter,

After brief distillation of perfume,
 And leave one staring in a sightless room
 With fingers woven in one's lap; the lips
 Pencilled with resignation; and with slips
 Of paper marked with Sympathy of Friends
 Lying upon a tray with damaged ends . . .

-- This the unmercy, that a witless force
 Should pause and plunder, nor resume its course
 Till it has prised the lips and drawn the soul
 With anguish from the frail enveloping whole . . .

This the grim irony, that brain and bone
 Should have no subtler value than a stone.

Heads nodding, and with tongues that clack accord
 Embroidering the much-repeated word:
He had to die . . . it's hard on her . . . but then
Death takes the meanest and the best of men . . .
You have to go when called for . . . it's the lot
Of Hogan, Solomon, Iscariot . . .
 The neighbours pace the room with creaking boots,
 Solemn as sextons in their dingy suits.

They punctuate with many a shy aside
 The silence that has lapped her like a tide,
 Exchange embarrassed glances, shift their feet
 And presently emerge upon the street
 Intent upon their business, which is not
 At all concerned with spade thrusts, wreaths and rot.

Frozen with sorrow, Mary sits alone
and thinks of Lazarus within the stone,
her brother, silent in a winding sheet
awaiting Christ, awaiting the fall of feet
awaiting the whispered, Come forth, Lazarus,
she only hears the rattling of a hearse.

Leo Kennedy

HORTICULTURAL

(1929)

We who are young observe with puckered brows
The caution of our elders; we discern
How prompt are they to take into their house
At threat of storm, the potted, delicate fern;
And how absurdly they place under glass
The wizen poppy and the tangled brier --
The common weeds which we ignore and pass,
Are nursed by them, and set about by wire.

Yet we who give no thought to wind or rain,
Having a fine indifference to these,
Must in our time rear barriers to pain,
And guard our tender plants, and box our trees;
And stand our winter bulbs in bowls of gravel;
And scream at thieving birds, and wish they'd travel!

Leo Kennedy

HYACINTHS FOR HADRIAN

'The mad Pope Hadrian declared himself no fitting successor to Peter, and fled to his villa at Padua to grow blooms, in which art he was skilled. He spoke well of the hyacinth, declaring its root a tiara for any pontiff.' --
Recollections of Three Papal Courts: Cardinal Sebastiani.

A pontiff of the Church resigned his crown
 Because it weighed too heavy on his head;
 Dispensed with papal ring and samite gown,
 And took to growing hyacinths instead.
 He found such pleasure in the roots of things
 That plot a resurrection out of sight;
 Eschewed the politics of God and Kings
 To nurture bulbs, and set his tubers right.
 And men declare this Hadrian was mad,
 That gave a sceptre for a pruning knife,
 That shirked a throne in Heaven for a fad,
 That fled from Holy Mother Church, his wife,
 To take the purple of the hyacinth,
 And con its triple crown, and milky plinth.

Leo Kennedy

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